

The New York Review of Science Fiction

Number One
September 1988
\$2.50

Samuel R. Delany Flow, My Tears... Theater and Science Fiction

Film and theater...
Illusion and imagination...

Writers tend to opt for the latter—but find it hard not to castigate the former. Why realize SF images on the giant screen or on the stage, the writer is always asking, when imagining them is what the fun's all about?

Still, with its commitment to illusion, film seems to love depicting SF images. From *Woman in the Moon* to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, through the Republic serials of Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers (not to mention such glorious amalgams as *Gene Autry and the Hidden City*), up through *2001*, *Star Wars*, and *E.T.*, science fiction has been a part of the movies. Most recently SF film seems to have settled, more or less comfortably, on the misty borderlands between fantasy and horror. Regularly, from this position, it produces interesting work almost every year, now (as it peers to the left) in a biting piece like *Brazil*, now (as it searches right) in some profoundly scary ones, like *Aliens* or *Near Dark*.

We speak of stage illusion, too. But that usually suggests a magician, not an actor. Even the secondary meaning of the term, the stage picture at a given moment, has something of magic about it. The point is that the "illusion" involved in film—the play of light and shadow on a screen creating the effect of motion—is at a very different level from that of the stage. There is a whole tradition of documentary film. But few of us would be comfortable speaking of "documentary theater."

Science fiction on the stage has certainly had a rather dicey career. Capek's *R.U.R.* and Hauptmann's *Gas, I and II* have a place in the development of world drama. But they don't hold up too well in revival. After giving us "Rossum's Universal Robots," Capek allowed insects and vermin a voice in his late twenties play *The Insect Comedy*, and audiences took it as gently chiding, though lovable, satire. When, however, in a truly astonishing full-length three-act, *Too True to be Good* (first presented in the United States by the Theater Guild in 1932), George Bernard Shaw gave a twenty-minute Act One monologue on the effects of science on modern life to a cold virus, audiences—at the threshold of a true science fiction theater—responded to this theatrical turn as simple affection. In the always popular Shaw canon, *Too True to be Good* is almost unheard of today—though it's a wonderful play.

We've had regular attempts to put *1984* on the stage. (At least twice it's reached the screen.) The last theatrical version I saw was in the summer of 1987, adapted by Pavel Kahout and directed by Jiri Zizka. Despite good acting, it plodded hopelessly over the boards of New York's Joyce Theater. The familiar turns of the familiar plot were set out like famous arias from some odd opera without music. (The simile belongs to my theater companion that evening, *Nation* drama critic Tom Dorsch.) Its message of coming doom—which, back in the actual year, changed subgenres from predictive dystopia to alternate historical speculation—seemed

(continued on page 11)

In this issue

Samuel R. Delany on the *Flow My Tears* play
Daniel M. Pinkwater on ethnic roots
Susan Palwick on *Trek*, et cetera
Kathryn Cramer on hard SF
plus reviews of books by
George Turner, Norman Spinrad,
Tim Powers, Elizabeth Scarborough,
Carl Amery, and Greg Bear

Kathryn Cramer Science Fiction and the Adventures of the Spherical Cow

What does science lend to fiction that is important enough to have a genre called "science fiction"? What does science fiction do with what science gives it?

Like the color blue, everyone knows what SF is, but only in a general sense. Color is a matter of individual perception—a matter of what your own rods and cones tell you—so there can be much disagreement over whether a particular shade is a green or a blue, a purple or a blue. Science fiction has no agreed-upon boundaries, no precise definition.

Still, there's been a persistent view that "hard" SF is somehow the core and center of the field (the true blue SF); that all other SF orbits around this center; and that, furthermore, the characteristic of this core is a particular attitude toward science and technology. So these questions need investigation, but have been given surprisingly little thought.

What does science have to do with science fiction? The name signifies some relationship to science, and there have been articles and books for decades on scientific content, sociology in SF, and physics in SF, and how you ought to know something about science to read it or write it, but since the days of John W. Campbell few attempts have been made to identify the *relationships* between science and fiction at the genre's core. The relationship cannot be determined by merely cataloging the instances in which science appears in SF, or by grouping the kind of sciences which tend to appear in SF. In order to determine the nature of the relationship between science and SF, we obviously have to take a new approach.

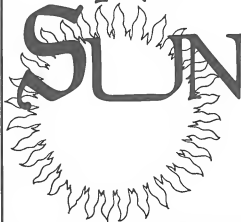
Rather than starting with science fiction and working back to science, as is the usual tack, let us start with science and work back to fiction. The usual approach assumes that we know what science

(continued on page 3)

Tor proudly presents the one-volume sequel to
The Book of the New Sun!

Gene Wolfe

The
Urth of
the New



The Urth of the New Sun

"...is a fine coda to what is arguably the finest piece of literature American science fiction has yet produced, the four-volume BOOK OF THE NEW SUN."

—*Chicago Sun-Times*

"Gene Wolfe has entered the ranks of those rare imaginative talents whose work will justly be regarded as classic for generations to come."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

The Urth of the New Sun

"...makes of the whole sequence a more perfect work...its importance lies in the complex of excitements and emotions that it awakens."

—*Washington Post Book World*

"Another brilliantly inventive, dense, demanding, at times intellectually stunning effort. Dazzling."

—*Kirkus*

"Gene Wolfe's new book soars, falls free, runs like the river that runs through it from universe to universe, between life and death and life again. The groundnote of it all is human pain, so that this fantasy has the weight of vision. Wolfe is our Melville."

—*Ursula K. LeGuin*

"Perhaps the year's most heralded science fiction or fantasy work." —*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

is, and wish only to explore science fiction. I suggest, however, that most of us do not know the side of science that lends itself to fiction as well as we might think.

There is a joke that experimental physicists tell about theoretical physicists which goes something like this:

A theoretical physicist loses his job at a university because of budget cuts and has to take a job as a milkman. After weeks and weeks of doing nothing but delivering milk, he cannot stand it any more, and decides to hold a colloquium. He assembles all the milkmen in a room, and, after they have all taken their seats, he walks up to the front of the room to the blackboard. Drawing a circle on the board, he says, "Consider a spherical cow of uniform density."

The primary humor of this joke is that it describes the experimental physicist's view of the theoretical physicist—the theoreticians seem to exist in a world of meaningless abstraction with no bearing on the realities of experimental physics. But rivalry between experimentalists and theoreticians aside, the other reason this joke is funny is that all scientific explanation is streamlined metaphor for what really is the case. This is so partially because scientists don't know everything, and partially because they throw out all small factors that muck up the mathematics (a perfectly legitimate technique for quickly obtaining fairly accurate results). Scientific generalizations are innately metaphorical.

Another joke, this time a mathematician's joke about physicists—the proof that all odd numbers are prime: The number 1 is prime, 3 is prime, 5 is prime, 7 is prime, 9 is experimental error, 11 is prime, 13 is prime, 15 is experimental error, 17 is prime, 19 is prime...

Math & the Cow

This misapplication of the mathematical techniques of physics to pure mathematics shows one way in which the abstraction and the reality diverge. In pure math, you don't have experimental error (although there are other ways to throw non-zero terms out of an equation to simplify the calculation). The theory does not equal the fact. This is a characteristic of science that the creationists have made much of, although I don't believe that they have properly understood what it means.

Scientific generalizations are metaphors for what appears—based on mathematical relations between the data and the theory—to be the case. The difference between statements like "light is a wave" and "light is a particle" on the one hand, and "light is a rose" on the other, is not that the first two are literal facts, whereas the latter is a metaphor. All three statements are metaphoric. Rather the first two metaphors have some mathematical justification, whereas the third does not (at least, not that I know of).

One presumes that, if the milkman/theoretical physicist continued on with his talk, he would explain the mathematical utility of assuming, for the purpose of argument, that this particular cow is spherical and has uniform density. It is from the rules of mathematics and of formal logic (the latter considered here as a subset of mathematics) that scientific metaphors derive their apparent firm bond with reality, and hence are often mistaken for reality itself. In the complete absence of mathematics, scientific metaphors are no more and no less meaningful than the statement "light is a rose."

When scientific ideas and formulations are invoked in a text that does not make use of mathematics in appropriate amounts, the text relies upon the existence of other texts which do. Someone who has read only the text without the mathematics cannot fully manipulate the ideas gleaned from that text unless the reader can reconstruct them on her own. Unbound from the fetters of mathematical convenience which kept her a creature of the mind, kept her from being a creature of the world, and set free to graze where she wants, the Spherical Cow becomes a creature of mythology; when cut off from mathematics, scientific theory becomes a form of folk wisdom.

However, before it can be woven into prose fiction or any other kind of prose aimed at the general reader, science is necessarily stripped of its mathematical bones. The cow must be cut loose. This is one of the most basic constraints upon incorporating science in a work of fiction. No matter how apparently accurate the text, science must be used as mythology. It is this aspect of science that caused the creationists to invent the term "secular humanism." They sensed, quite correctly, that the science in their children's textbooks was every bit as much a mythology as the Book of Genesis. What they failed to understand is that the textbooks exist in relation to other texts in which science is not a mythology, texts with all the

The New York Review of Science Fiction

ISSUE #1, SEPTEMBER 1988

FEATURES

Samuel R. Delany: *Flow, My Tears...*: Theater and Science Fiction : 1

Kathryn Cramer: Science Fiction and the Adventures of the Spherical Cow : 1

Susan Palwick: I Was a Teenaged Crud Fan: Confessions of an Uptown Girl (part 1 of 3) : 7

A Column: Daniel M. Pinkwater Speaks : 20

REVIEWS

Norman Spinrad's *Little Heroes*, reviewed by Greg Cox : 8

Greg Bear's *Eternity*, reviewed by Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden : 10

Tim Powers's *On Stranger Tides*, reviewed by Greg Cox : 11

Elizabeth Scarborough's *The Goldcamp Vampire*, reviewed by Greg Cox : 17

The SF novels of Carl Amery, discussed by Frank Dietz : 18

George Turner's *Drowning Towers*, reviewed by Patrick Nielsen Hayden : 21

PLUS

Reading lists by Aigle Budrys (p. 5), Lewis Shiner (p. 6), and Larry Niven (p. 21);
lagniappe by Gene Wolfe (p. 10), Jim Young (p. 15), and Patrick Nielsen Hayden (p. 18);
and a Statement of Purpose, p. 24.

Drawings on pp. 20 and 22 by Daniel M. Pinkwater.

Kathryn Cramer, Features Editor; Samuel R. Delany, Contributing Editor; David G. Hartwell, Reviews Editor;
Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Designer; Teresa Nielsen Hayden, Managing Editor; Susan Palwick, Fantasy Editor.
Staff: Greg Cox, Debbie Notkin, Tom Weber.

Published monthly by Dragon Press, P.O. Box 78, Pleasantville NY 10570.
\$2.50 per copy; subscriptions, \$24 per year. Please make checks payable to Dragon Press.
Copyright © 1988 Dragon Press.

mathematical underpinnings.

For, except in that very stylized form called the scientific paper, readers will not tolerate more than a line or two of equations. Even in small doses, the only equations that are acceptable are (a) highly recognizable equations which need not actually be read as mathematics, for example $E=mc^2$, and (b) simple arithmetic. This is as true of science articles in the *New York Times* as it is of science fiction. (Try typing various kinds of equations on the average typewriter and you will quickly discover limits of the range of equations that the manufacturers of typewriters consider to be properly found in non-specialized prose.) Even the "hardest" of science fiction relies upon what is, in effect, folk wisdom.

While, in a sense, science is one of the most democratic pursuits because the experimental results establish the hierarchy of dominance, it is also one of the most elitist. Those who don't learn (formally or otherwise) the basics of calculus (or whatever branch of mathematics applies most heavily to the field in question) forever remain consumers of the body of scientific theory, and can never be its producers. Their teachers draw circles on the blackboard and say, "Today we're going to learn about the Spherical Cow," not "Consider a spherical cow." Those who don't have the math are excluded from argument over whether the cow should be spherical or circular, of uniform density or hollow in the middle; they are told to learn rather than to consider.

What science gives to science fiction is an ever-changing body of metaphor which provides at least the illusion of simultaneous realism and rationalism. Both of these words have complex and tricky definitions, and because of the way science carefully blends the one into the other, they are easily mistaken one for another. The *Oxford English Dictionary* should be of help here:

The most relevant portions of the definition of "realism" are: "1. The scholastic doctrine of objective or absolute existence of universals of which Thomas Aquinas was the chief exponent; b. Belief in the real existence of matter as the object of perception (natural realism); also the view that the physical world has independent reality and is not ultimately reducible to universal mind and spirit;" and "3. Close resemblance to what is real; fidelity of representation, rendering the precise details of the real thing or sense."

Similarly (and in contrast), the most relevant portions of the definition of "rationalism" are: "2. *Theol.* a. The practice of explaining in a manner agreeable to reason whatever is apparently supernatural in the records of sacred history; b. The principle of regarding reason as the chief or only guide in matters of religion, or of employing ordinary reason to criticize and interpret religious doctrines; 3. *Metaph.* a theory (opposed to empiricism or sensationalism) which regards reason, rather than sense, as the foundation of the certainty of knowledge."

The portions of these definitions most applicable to science are 1 and 1(b) of the definition of realism, and 3 of rationalism. With respect to realism, the practice of science rests upon the assumptions that there exist universals out there to be discovered, that nature is internally consistent, that ultimately nature is ordered rather than chaotic and that the existence of nature and its ordering is independent of human psychology. The influence of rationalism in science allows the possibility of abstraction based on generalizations arrived at through close observation of nature. These abstractions take on a life of their own and are given strength by the fact that reason seems, while one is performing experiments, to be ever so much more internally consistent than reality. Scientific realism leads naturally to scientific rationalism; and when rationalism leads to provable but previously undiscovered realities, the marriage of the two is affirmed.

And yet they are contradictory.

As has already been discussed, the inclusion of science in science fiction requires that the rationalistic glue of mathematics be stripped from science so that it may properly be included in the text. Furthermore, because science fiction is a subset of the non-naturalistic fictions and involves events that provably have not happened or will not happen, or at very least are highly unlikely, when one reads a work of science fiction, one has necessarily put aside various of the tools of realism and of rationalism. Science fiction,

even hard science fiction, must be evaluated not as science but as art.

That having been said, the portions of these definitions most applicable to science fiction are 3 of realism, and 2(a) & (b) of rationalism. The realism of science fiction is a close relative of photographic realism and of socialist realism in painting. This is what motivates SF's occasional rejection of stylistic sophistication in favor of scientific or technical detail, what motivates the use of dry, journalistic prose: unornamented prose, rich in scientific detail, has the ring of truth to the modern ear. Which leads us to 2(a) of rationalism: "The practice of explaining in a manner agreeable to reason whatever is apparently supernatural in the records of sacred history." This definition suggests that rationalist theology is science fiction's grandparent on the side of its parent, supernatural literature. This relationship to rationalist theology is what motivates much of the excessive "worldbuilding" in both science fiction and fantasy. Much of the rationalism of science fiction is in fact rationalization.

While the realism and the rationalism of science or science fiction may be in direct conflict, the apparent belief (on the part of the author) that they exist in harmony, and are nearly one and the same thing is what gives a science fiction story the feeling we associate with hard science fiction. Science creates the character of the Spherical Cow, and the science fiction writer creates her adventures. Never mind that the very idea of a spherical cow is absurd, and that her adventures may be more absurd still. Science fiction readers can suspend their disbelief as surely as earnest, rational Christians can assert the truth of the virgin birth.

The New Wave & the Cow

Given the tension which is assumed to exist between hard SF and the New Wave (as represented, for instance, in various anthologies edited by Judith Merril), it is most surprising to discover that a number of stories in Merril's groundbreaking anthology *England Swings SF* make as much use of science as some of the "hard" SF classics like "Nightfall." Examples which come to mind are "You and Me and the Continuum" and "Plan for the Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy," both by J. G. Ballard, as well as Pamela Zoline's "The Heat Death of the Universe." None of these are, however, technophilic (a point which I will get to in a few moments), nor do they contain the kind of linear, logical-positivist extrapolation of a few isolated ideas that we associate with hard SF.

The emotional impact of "Nightfall" derives from its affirmation of the existence of universals, and its affirmation of the subjugation of psychology to the external. The movement of heavenly bodies is regulated by forces that are not subject to our opinions, our religious beliefs, our political institutions; thus, it will get dark and everyone will go crazy. The only way any one of them (in Asimov, it's usually a him) could have known what was in store for the lot of them is to have turned his attention away from the ordinary details of everyday life, and toward the abstractions of mathematics and astronomy. "Nightfall" affirms scientific realism; it affirms universals. And the story simultaneously affirms rationalism in that the crucial information was available only through reason applied through science. It reinforces many of the comfortable ideas that the consumers of science have come to hold about science: that science is a necessary pursuit, and that our trust in science to ameliorate the human condition is warranted, even if scientists occasionally fail.

"Nightfall" is also *unrealistic* in the sense that, if such a place were to exist, the people and the place would not really be like this. Asimov inserts instead everyday reality in the twentieth century. Nor is the world of "Nightfall" a "built" world. There are no rationalistic reasons for every detail of the setting. But this lack of constructed detail can be ignored by both reader and writer. The story is a success.

J. G. Ballard's "You and Me and the Continuum" contains as much or more scientific detail as the Asimov story. What it captures better is the experience of the practice of science; seeming to look at a very large object through a microscope, then suddenly looking out at the world through the wrong end of a telescope; the strange confusions over arcane matters. The sentence which epitomizes this story is, "In part a confusion of mathematical models was respon-

sible, Dr. Nathan decided." Ballard portrays the experience of confusion and doubt.

While Ballard refuses to affirm the usual confidence in science, the story displays a respect for and a knowledge of science which may, in fact, run deeper than the analogous characteristics in the Asimov story. Ballard seems to take much the same attitude toward SF affirming the ideology of science (as manifested, for example, in the Asimov story) as Henri Poincaré took toward the philosophical outlook of Bertrand Russell: "Mr. Russell will tell me no doubt that it is not a question of psychology, but of logic and epistemology; and I shall be led to answer that there is no logic and epistemology independent of psychology." (H. Poincaré, 1909)

Ballard provides a variety of realism which feels very much like scientific thought, but which takes no particular position on the existence of universals when invoking science—thereby undercutting realism. Similarly, his characters apply reason, but seem to have little success with it. He invokes both realism and rationalism, in the same dosages as Dr. Asimov prescribes, but refuses to allow these two 'isms' to merge into a harmonious whole, refuses to pull us into easy aesthetic confidence. He insists on presenting contradictions and unresolved conflicts. And yet he displays no less respect for science.

"Plan for the Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy" is written in the style of a scientific paper. By inserting sensationalistic words into the apparently objective form of the scientific paper, Ballard reveals the concealed violence and sexuality, the absurdity, and the emotional detachment of a literary form which we have come to assume is transparent, inert, and does not interact with its contents. Again, his respect for and knowledge of science are apparent, but he does not affirm that the values of science are higher than those of the rest of the world.

Pamela Zoline's "The Heat Death of the Universe" uses scientific concepts as emotional metaphor. Science is inherently metaphorical (as discussed above) in its literalism—and it has its emotional uses among those involved in the practice of science! Certainly, those who practice science are concerned with what is really the case; with the literal level. To many, this is the primary distinction between science and art: science is concerned with literal truth and art with metaphorical. But as is often the case with such dichotomies, the metaphorical in science has gone underground. It is in the axioms. It is in the most literal representations that science has to offer. And it is in the emotional experience of doing science.

No one ever has to say that emotion is under discussion. The experience is passed on one to another. People derive what meaning they can from it. And if the theory of evolution or the theory of relativity or whatever happens to accurately reflect your emotional life, you can feel that it is all true, that your perceptions are real, that all is as you believed it to be. If you do this for others as well as yourself, well, you are more likely to be praised for it. (This may happen anyway for reasons unrelated to emotional validity, but the emotional validity of the theory always helps.)

For the general reader, Isaac Asimov's "Nightfall" somehow has the trappings of hard SF, whereas the Ballard stories and the Zoline story don't. Never mind that Asimov asks us to believe in "journalists" and "closures" on a planet which is not our own, which has a number of suns and which hasn't known night any time within recent memory. "Nightfall" has the look and feel of Real Science.

Although much effort, over the last couple of decades, has gone into pointing out the relationships of science fiction to serious literature, not much has gone into investigating those virtues that science fiction derives from its unique relationship to science. The great early defenses of SF were based upon the wonder of science and the sense of that wonder aroused in the reader. At its best, science fiction tends to be about the emotional experience of discovering what is true. In "hard" SF, this experience is represented metaphorically by scientific discoveries of great consequence. This emotional experience is what "Nightfall" and "The Heat Death of the Universe" have in common.

The Cow in the Machine

What we habitually call "hard" SF is more precisely technophilic SF; it has an attitude. As Poul Anderson put it, "Science, technology, material achievement and the rest are basically good. In them lies a necessary if not sufficient condition for the improvement of man's lot, even his mental and spiritual lot." He also differentiates the hard SF story from other varieties of SF: "A hard science story bases itself upon real, present-day science or technology and carries these further with a minimum of imaginary forces, materials or laws of nature."

There is a hard science attitude, and a hard science feel. And both are quite distinct from hard science content. What the consumer of science (reader of science fiction) identifies as hard SF has the attitude and feel...both Asimov and Ballard have the content. But, to the readers, one is hard SF and one is not.

Furthermore, a story is much more likely to be identified as "hard" SF—regardless of the amount of actual science it contains—if the narrative voice is pragmatic, deterministic, and matter-of-fact about the many high-tech artifacts among which the story takes place, and if the future (or alternate present or past) in which the protagonist lives is primarily the result of significant technological change from the here-and-now. Through repetition we have come to identify this narrative voice as "futuristic." Although the futuristic voice tends to be optimistic, it has been blended surprisingly well with the 1980s' apparent pessimism in the characters of William Gibson's Johnny Mnemonic and Bruce Sterling's Abelson Lindsay.

Science is the literary territory of SF, no matter how the science is approached. The emotional content of science is well within the literary territory of SF. And a close relationship with science should surely put such SF within the core of what gives science fiction its name. Can it ever be called hard SF if it does not affirm the harmonious marriage of realism and rationalism in science, if it does not take an upbeat outlook on technology, if the narrator is not pragmatic and deterministic?

Consider a spherical cow of uniform density. We'll affectionately call her Marble. Let Marble represent science in the green field of science fiction. Consider each science fiction story as a tale of some of Marble's many adventures. In some of the stories she is a major character, and in others she is not. Sometimes she even has speaking roles (otherwise known as expository lumps). But she is in all of the stories, if only as a walk-on character or as a third party, referred to in conversation, but never actually seen. If the genre under discussion is titled SCIENCE FICTION, give it therefore the subtitle THE ADVENTURES OF THE SPHERICAL COW. ▴

Read This

Recently read and recommended by *Algis Budrys*:

Resurrection, Inc., Kevin J. Anderson, Signet, \$3.50

Saints, Orson Scott Card, Tor, \$4.95 (C)

Druid's Blood, Esther M. Friesner, Signet, \$3.50

The Silence of the Lambs, Thomas Harris, St. Martin's, \$18.95 (C)

Journey to Fuatung, William B. Sanders, Quesar, \$3.95

Koko, Peter Straub, Dutton, \$19.95 (C)

(2) An interestingly styled frank slasher novel that verges on presenting a brilliantly bestial sociopath as the crime-buster. Technically and conceptually instructive.

(3) Initially an apparent slasher novel about crazed Viet Nam veterans, it inventively uses the craziness to propel itself over the border into fantasy. Casts light on Borgesian irrationality.

(C) A release of Card's hitherto scarce *A Woman of Destiny*, a Dickensian non-SF novel set in early Mormon days.

“

READERCON 2 November
18-20 1988 **Guest of Honor:**
Samuel R. Delany *The*
Lowell Hilton, Lowell,
MA **Memberships**
\$15 until 10/14, \$20
thereafter *Hotel rates*
\$75/\$80/\$85/\$90/\$120
Hotel phone 617-452-
1200 Convention committee:
PO Box 6138, Boston MA
02209 or phone 617-576-
0415 eves & weekends

”

Read This

Recently read and recommended by Lewis Shiner:

The Media Lab by Stewart Brand (Viking hc). What the future already looks like; must read for hard SF research.

Four Hundred Billion Stars by Paul J. McAuley (Del Rey pb). Excellent science, grittily convincing human relationships, precision prose.

Libra by Don DeLillo (Viking hc). The past as fantasy by one of America's greatest writers.

The Day of Creation by J. G. Ballard (Gollancz hc). A return to all-out surrealism from the master.

Semiotext(e) USA, ed. by Jim Fleming and Peter Lamborn Wilson (\$8.95 trade pb from 522 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, NY NY 10027). The new American underground: Subgenius, Last International, Robert Anton Wilson, and so much more—a motherlode of indispensable, brain-shattering ideas.

Islands in the Net by Bruce Sterling (Arbor House hc). A brilliantly-realized near future, hopeful and convincing at the same time.

Love in the Time of Cholera by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Knopf hc). Wouldn't you like to read a timeless masterpiece of world literature the same year it was published?

Housekeeping by Marilynne Robinson (Washington Square press pb). Okay, I can't pretend this is anything but a mainstream novel—but it takes you into another mind in an unforgettable way, with the most beautiful prose I've ever read.

The Brave Little Toaster Goes to Mars by Thomas M. Disch (Doubleday hc). The perfect dessert—so good, and yet so good for you.

—August 3, 1988

Still available from Dragon Press:

Samuel R. Delany **The American Shore**

Meditations on a tale of science fiction
by Thomas M. Disch—*Angouleme*

Hardcover, \$20 plus \$2 shipping
Dragon Press, P.O. Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570.

I Was a Teenaged Crud Fan: Confessions of an Uptown Girl

Part 1 of 3



Back in April, the staff of *The Little Magazine* spent several hours sitting in the Balcony, a dark, upscale bar on 106th and Broadway. The meeting was part birthday celebration for Tom Weber, part gossip session, part planning session for our reincarnation as *NYRSF*. Nervous about my role in the new order—earlier discussions had indicated an intensely academic, theoretical bent I found both intimidating and opaque—I said, “Sometimes I feel like an anti-intellectual in this group.”

Crowded next to me at the small wooden table, Patrick Nielsen Hayden reacted with as much impatience as I’d felt during previous conversations about the epistemology of hard science fiction. “Susan, I just don’t understand what makes you say these things, given the general level of your comments during critical discussions! You pop out with these bizarre statements about yourself, and I can never figure out where they’re coming from.”

There was a five-minute collective attempt to figure out where I was coming from, during which David Hartwell suggested that I write an essay about social maladjustment in the science fiction field—a topic dear to my heart, as David knows. The talk swung to hall costumes, and I mentioned having once been an audio engineer for a pair of dancing tribbles at a *Star Trek* convention.

I’d offered the story as an amusing anecdote, and everyone laughed. But Patrick, as startled as he’d been by my earlier confession, said, “My God! You started out at *Trek* cons! Susan Palwick as crud fan! You’ll have to put that in your memoirs!”

David grinned and added, “Yes, you really must write about that.”

Perhaps he thought of the suggestions as separate essays, but even then it was obvious to me that they formed one topic. As I began outlining the piece, I realized that it also pointed to the true explanation of why I feel like an anti-intellectual around people who engage in vigorous discussions of deconstruction. For all three situations, of course, involve social persona: those subtle and most important of costumes, which all of us spend years designing, decorate with as much care as any sequin-mad Bird-Empress of the Universe, and wear every day of our lives.

Patrick hasn’t known me very long. When he met me, slightly less than two years ago, I was well advanced in the evolution of my current persona: the articulate, literary, Princeton-and-Clarion-educated young fantasy writer who’d made several well-received magazine sales. At the time, I was still living with my mother in New Jersey and working three days a week as a word-processing operator in a bank, but I was trying to cultivate a Manhattan image by wearing funky clothing and dancing at clubs.

A year ago I heightened that image by actually moving onto the island, adding a layer of writerly mystique by renting the rambling, book-cluttered apartment formerly inhabited by Ellen Kushner, Mimi Panitch, and Terri Windling. Over the next six months I acquired a black leather jacket, numerous nifty pairs of earrings, and a new and much more lucrative part-time job, this time as a public relations assistant at a glossy executive search firm.

If all of this sounds cold and calculating, it was. I landed the self and the job through friendship, connections, and sheer good luck, but I’d wanted something like them for a long time. I’d wanted to be cool and writerly, I’d wanted to be the kind of Uptown Girl who traveled in editorial circles and sat in Broadway bars having abuse conversations about literary theory.

Why, and so I now am, more or less, and so Patrick more or less perceives me, which explains his puzzlement at my insecurity. David, who’s known me for three years—since a few months before I went to Clarion West—wasn’t puzzled at all. David remembers my first *Little Magazine* meeting, when my affect was still post-Princeton preppy and I must have been exuding visible terror at being in the

apartment of “gasp!” Samuel R. Delany, whom I was convinced would summarily behead me for my ignorance of contemporary poetry. (“Oh, don’t worry,” Chip said cheerfully when the subject actually came up. “Really, there’s tons of stuff I haven’t read either.”)

Neither Patrick nor David knew me when I was twelve, the age at which I decided—in tearful rage and jealousy at the talent of a classmate who had, in half an hour, written a better story than the one I’d been laboring over for days—that I wanted to be a Writer. Longed for it, in fact, in every cell of my being. Sobbing, locked in the bathroom, my clumsiness with words weighing as heavily on me as physical shackles, I resolved to work and work and work until I could write well. I might never write well—I probably wouldn’t, in fact—but maybe, just maybe, if I tried as hard as I knew how, someday I’d write something even half as wonderful as the story my classmate had written.

I didn’t have many social activities to distract me from this quest. I was unusually homey even for twelve: a skinny, anxious kid with bad skin, glasses, braces and facial hair who read too much, cried too easily and possessed neither athletic ability nor fashion sense. I would have been a perfect target for adolescent cruelty even if I hadn’t also been a white, straight-A student in an uneasily integrated school—during an era when black kids with any bullying urges at all quickly learned that liberal guilt and political paranoia on the part of a mostly-white faculty greatly reduced the chances of punishment.

There was a gang of black girls who publicly teased me about my mustache (“Why do you have that? Is it because you have more boy juices than girl juices?”), routinely knocked my books out of my arms, and made a habit of stealing my lunch. There was a clique of white girls who made cruel comments about me behind my back and professed to like me when I was looking—but the only use they had for me was to copy my homework, and all of us knew it. And boys of my description were a source of painful, awkward terror.

There were also lots of nice kids of both races, including a group of blacks—possessed of courage and decency rarely found in adults, let alone teenagers—who defended me during a particularly ugly run-in with my black tormentors, and who insisted on reporting the incident to the authorities even though I didn’t want to make any trouble. By and large, however, I was far too shy to recognize other people’s attempts at friendliness, and far too self-conscious and fearful of rejection to make any overtures of my own.

I was saved by a black girl named Nadia, a year older than I and phenomenally bright, who decided to put a stop to the bullying once and for all. Whenever she saw people hassling me she’d walk up to them and say calmly and distinctly, “STOP THAT. Leave her alone.”

And they’d stop. Such force of personality seemed nothing short of miraculous to me, and we became fast friends. Like me, Nadia was in all the advanced classes, and both of us adored *Star Trek*. We spent hours on the phone every night talking about school, the adventures of the Enterprise, and the motorized robot Nadia was building—in her basement, largely out of molded plastic, wood, and electrical tape—for the science fair. It would, she announced with her usual unquestionable authority, be able to walk and shake hands.

I never doubted it; and because I was so in awe of her intellect and self-possession, it took me a long time to realize that her social isolation was even greater than mine. Short and stocky, she fit accepted notions of attractiveness no better than I did; and being a smart black kid, at that age in that school system, was far worse than being a smart white kid. The academic circles in which Nadia and I traveled were primarily white and primarily Jewish. Gentle though I was, at least I looked like everybody else. Nadia didn’t, and hanging out with the college-bound honies was considered at best uncool and at worst contemptible by the large proportion of black students already defined—by themselves and the adults around them—as underachievers.

My first recognition of Nadia's mortality came at the long-awaited science fair, held on the school lawn on a brutally hot and humid day in June. Her robot wasn't working properly—perhaps because of the heat, perhaps because the lovingly constructed casing was too heavy for the motors. She'd been anxiously fussing with it and had finally gotten it to make some small gesture, lifting an arm or turning its head. Some other kids (black? white? I don't remember) got bored with the robot's limited movements and poured a can of soda over its head. At that point the mechanism shorted out completely, and Nadia, humiliated and fighting tears, was left with months of work reduced to an inert, sticky mass—which, to compound the injury, quickly began drawing flies.

The project won the prize anyway. I don't think it made Nadia feel any better. She already knew the teachers liked her (our science teacher was an uncommonly humane man who—after helping me plan my own hopeless project involving Atlantic ocean currents and multilingual messages sealed in bottles—had given me a long, gentle lecture about the value of failure in scientific experimentation), but she also knew that her robot had been, by her own high standards and the merciless judgement of our peers, a dismal failure. Looking back on it now, I think impressing the kids with the soda would have meant a lot more to her than getting a plaque in assembly.

By then, however, both of us had a special and cherished identity. The previous February I'd seen an ad in *TV Guide* for a *Star Trek* convention at the Roosevelt Hotel in Manhattan. My father and stepmother lived in New York, an easy bus commute from the hotel, so Nadia and I decided to go.

It's no exaggeration to say I experienced a religious conversion

at that convention. There I was, an isolated and painfully gawky kid, suddenly thrown into a social setting with hundreds of other people who cared passionately about the same obscure TV show I did—and who were, in effect, not only given permission to be weird, but told that their weirdness made them better than other people. I remember a heartfelt weep by Nichelle Nichols in which she told a standing-room-only crowd that *Star Trek* was about love and peace and understanding, that it was about optimism and the efforts of humanity to evolve into wiser, more benevolent beings—and that all of us in that room were very special, very visionary people for believing in that message.

No revival tent ever contained more emotion, and I had never felt so much acceptance or love or self-pride. I glowed; I babbled. I'm sure I cried, and I know I talked of nothing else for weeks afterward—to the point where my mother took me aside and explained gently that I really shouldn't talk so much about *Star Trek*, because some people were, well, bored by it.

I can only guess how much more Nichols' message, coming from a black woman, must have meant to Nadia. Years later, she told me that her resolve to be a NASA scientist dated from that convention.

So let the other kids be mean; peer pressure and fashion and athletics be damned! Ostracism still hurt, of course, but some of the sting had softened. However unpopular Nadia and I may have been with the stylish set, we now knew that we belonged somewhere, that there was a place where our strangeness was a badge of honor. We were humanists. We were visionaries. We were the few, the proud, the Trekkies.

(Continued next issue...) ➤

Little Heroes by Norman Spinrad

New York: Bantam Spectra, August 1988; \$4.95 paperback; 563 pp.

Reviewed by Greg Cox

The future is one we have seen before, including Spinrad's own scay novella "Street Meat" (recently reprinted in *Other Americas*): a bladenurized urban nightmare just a few decades from now, where the ruthless machinations of the world's corporate rulers exist on a plane of reality several levels away from the squalid, deadly economy of the streets. But high-tech is spreading like a brush fire through both worlds, throwing off unexpected sparks—like the Zap, an "electronic acid trip" that can be turned on and off like a switch, or computer-generated rock stars that exist only on video. Shades of Count Zero and Max Headroom!

So, has Spinrad gone cyberpunk?

Not really, or perhaps only to the extent that today's "Movement" owes a lot to *Big Jack Barron* and the rest of the New Wave. At most, the recent avalanche of minornovels has served to drag Spinrad back down to the streets, after the magical interstellar mystery tours of *The Void Captain's Tale* and *Child of Fortune*. *Little Heroes* is maybe five percent Neuromancer, and the rest is pure *Spinrad*, which, when one takes into account his distinctive strengths and excesses, adds up to a pretty good book.

Do I hear an objection? Nowadays, when one admits to reading Spinrad, it's not uncommon to be challenged. C'mon, it is said, the man's stuck in the Sixties, he's obsessed with sex, he doesn't know when to shut up... (And, yes, we are still talking about his books.) These are hard charges to refute, especially where *Little Heroes* is concerned, because they're more or less true; at the center of Spinrad's multi-track plot is aging flower child Glorianna O'Toole's attempt to bring the spirit of Woodstock back to life by means of an artificial Jumping Jack Flash of her own creation (and, by the way, does anybody else think that Tracey Ullman has ripped off the character with her own "High Priestess of Rock-n-Roll" bitick?), while it can accurately be said that the varied inhabitants of the book do not so much lead lives of quiet desperation as they do lives of desperate horniness. (Excessive perhaps, but unrealistic? I've been to conventions...) Furthermore, Spinrad's mantra-like repetition of his favorite, preferably polylingual phrases can sometimes produce a powerful cumulative effect, but only at great cost to the reader's patience; uptown New York is referred to as "the white thighs of

Chocorica City" so many times that the metaphor was coming out of my *culo*, *verdad*? Sometimes, in fact, the prose is recycled so overtly that one can't help suspecting sloppiness, as when two separate characters come up with the same Marxist quote ("To each according to his needs, from each according to his ability") in the space of a few chapters, or when the concept of the "just deal" (emphasis Spinrad's) is independently arrived at by another pair of characters a mere thirty pages apart.

But all of this nitpicking ignores the more compelling virtues of both Spinrad's writing in general and *Little Heroes* in particular...

For one thing, what's wrong with the values of the Sixties, especially when, as here, they are placed in direct contention or comparison with those of the present and future? They aren't just nostalgia trips; there's a dialectic going on. If Spinrad's *Songs from the Stars* and novels of the Second Starfaring Age showed us his vision of what the Sixties might have led to, then *Little Heroes* is even more directly engaged with the present, asking us what in the world went wrong with the Age of Aquarius. I'm not sure I buy all his anti-establishment theories, and wonder about the conspicuous absence of AIDS in this near-future, but at the end of the Reagan era, when (according to locus) David Gerrold feels obliged to just say no to marijuanas while rewriting *When HARLE Was One* for Eighties consumption, a little sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll can be refreshing. Even in SF.

Still more welcome is Spinrad's emphasis on the inner life of his characters, and the ways in which their private drives and fears interact with their environment, and the needs of others, to determine their destinies. Sadly enough, the science fiction novel of psychology and character, as exemplified in the past by such works as *Dying Inside*, *The Demolished Man*, and almost any book by Theodore Sturgeon, isn't all that easy to find these days—and probably never has been. Most of the cyber-characters seem to have no inner life at all, or, if they do, they're hiding it behind their mirrorshades, not to mention that cool, efficient, *noirish* detachment. And then there's the larger-than-life protagonists of all those space operas and dragonquests, who are so busy saving the universe they barely have time to think, or feel, or grow.

ORSON SCOTT CARD

SEVENTH SON

"A tribute to the art of storytelling. Highly recommended."
—*Library Journal*

"Another major effort by a world-class talent."
—*Booklist*

"Card has uncovered a rich vein of folklore and magic...his best so far."
—*Kirkus*

"...reflective blend of folktale, history, parable, and pioneer narrative...a story of deep delight."
—*Publisher's Weekly*



53353-4 ★ \$3.95 ★ 256 pages



Gene Wolfe
Riddle

Across the sea, across the land
Across a lady's lily hand
Traveling Golden without feet,
By wind, by wave, by farm, by wheat.

Eternity by Greg Bear

New York: Warner Books, December 1988; \$16.95 hardcover; 432 pp.

Reviewed by Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden

Eternity, Greg Bear's sequel to his novel *Eon*, is a big book, probably in excess of 150,000 words; like *Eon*, it will make a fat paperback. It stands on its own, though several of its many plot lines are only loosely connected to the central matters of the book and weaken its structure. Those bits still make good reading if you haven't read *Eon*, but their primary purpose is to tie up threads left hanging at the end of the first book; or what's a sequel for?

In *Eternity*'s middle-distance future, Earth has been ravaged by nuclear war, and its surviving population is attempting a slow, painful reconstruction. They're aided in this by the inhabitants of Thistledown, a hollowed-out asteroid parked in Earth orbit. Meanwhile, the people of Thistledown are in conflict over whether to reopen the Way, a wormlike interdimensional passageway that potentially provides access to distant and/or alternate continua. In earlier times the Way brought them wealth, power, and a generous scope for their endeavors. It also embroiled them in the Jar Wars, the Jars being an aggressive, intransigent, and unknowable race of aliens who contest their control of the Way. The closing of the Way in *Eon* incidentally stranded a major character in an alternate time-stream, and first she and then her granddaughter have been trying to find a way back to Earth ever since. There's a great deal more going on besides.

Bear integrates the book's numerous subplots and settings fairly successfully. His use of shifting viewpoints helps. The contemporary Hellenistic alternate time-stream is seen through the eyes of a young student at the University of Alexandria (yes, the library is still there); the post-holocaust Earth is seen from the viewpoint of a couple who have spent their lives helping administer the reconstruction; and so on, through 432 pages. The book's *tour de force* piece of worldbuilding, the old, intricate, technology-saturated society of Thistledown, is necessarily seen from a multitude of angles. The community has multilayered overlapping political factions (with philosophies, with sub-factions), social institutions, religions, economic parameters, and an entire appurtenance of language, arts, and custom wrapped around its assorted parts. The other continua are similarly well-realized, if not in such depth, and all have a nice particularity of everyday detail. Seeing the various social contexts through the eyes of characters who are convincingly people of their time and place, and who from that angle care deeply about the events taking place, gives their actions genuine moral weight, and gives the book a sense of overall relatedness. It doesn't smell of travelogues.

There have been SF novels with such elaborately articulated settings before. Too often they've been like watching someone solve the world's largest crossword puzzle: some recognition is no doubt due for the sheer amount of work involved, but still, the only point of the exercise is to fill in the innumerable details of an arbitrary pattern;

Spinrad's little heroes don't save the world. They don't even clean up Chocorica City. Their victories are largely intangible, internal, and inconclusive: triumphs of symbolism and personal integrity. Gloriana O'Toole brings back the music and spirit of her youth all right, but Spinrad doesn't strain her credibility by suggesting that her moment of glory is anything but a brief, fragile demonstration of human resilience in the face of a really awful dystopia. The Blue Meanies don't disappear, they just find out their grip is a little looser than they thought. Not much of a power fantasy, perhaps, but a good deal richer and more believable than blowing up the Death Star.

In short, to steal this season's hot catchphrase, *Little Heroes* proves that Norman Spinrad is getting more and more like himself. Long-winded though he may sometimes be, this is generally good news. ▶

and privileging such productions as "creative" is a red herring, human creativity being in fact infinite, a hypertrophied function of our ability to get things wrong.

On a more trivial note, Bear even manages to keep track of a horde of slight variations in spelling and nomenclature (Alexandria/Alexandrea) when switching back and forth between his main-sequence and his Hellenistic universe—not a thing to make or break a book, but it's rare, and it speaks for his careful attention to his worlds. It made us cheer, anyway.

All of which makes for a work of "good hard SF," something we're starting to see discussed as if it were a subgenre in its own right—presumably as opposed to the works of other writers whose effects depend too much on sacrificing the other elements we expect: human characters, a believable sequence of events, consistent physical laws. To an extent, the putative subgenre is nothing new; long ago, before science fiction was subdivided by the marketing geniuses, we called it "good SF." Like Greg Benford, Paul Preuss, and other practitioners of this recently-rediscovered form, Greg Bear does more with science than merely present it as a genre marker; for him, it is a generous and elaborate structure, interesting in its own right. Further, like Benford, Bear treats scientific speculation as something structurally inherent to the science fiction novel, but doesn't expect it to carry the entire weight of the book.

Given Bear's manifest belief that these aspects of fiction matter, it's probably fair to say that his prose still lacks a certain compression. It does not straddle with its vividness; the reality of the subject matter is not present at the level of the language itself. Still, it has clarity, if at length; his sentences mean what they intend to mean, which is rare enough.

Bear has been much compared to Arthur C. Clarke, mostly for the way so many of his stories climax in episodes of cosmic power and transcendence. But in Bear's universe, awesome cosmic power is a very particular and delimited thing. In *Eternity*, the people on Thistledown can't uplift the sufferers of the post-holocaust Earth by making their hard decisions for them; similarly, the powerful intercessors from the far future can't settle any arguments, but only limit the technology of those arguing. Dead is still dead, and lost is still lost. In this, Bear reminds us of Poul Anderson at his best. All things are not possible, even for terrifically advanced cosmic intelligences; there is always, therefore, potential for value and choice. On some inaccessible level this may be a kind of anthropomorphism: who's to say that concepts such as "value"—to say nothing of specific values—have any meaning at all to actual beings so removed from ourselves? But until some unimaginable hard-SF genius comes along, vast, remote, and unsympathetic, and successfully tells us a story without them, they'll do. ▶

On Stranger Tides by Tim Powers
New York: Ace, 1987; \$16.95 hardcover; 325 pp.
Reviewed by Greg Cox

In *Dinner at Deviant's Palace*, the novel that won Powers his second Philip K. Dick award, a familiar melody from *Peter and the Wolf* is revealed to be a weapon of supernatural power. In the same way, ever since *The Drawing of the Dark* and *The Anubis Gates*, Powers has worked an alchemical change upon the stuff of history, creating pasts richer and more strange than they teach in History 101.

Thus, *On Stranger Tides* transforms John Chandiagac, a naive puppeteer, into a buccaneer named Jack Shandy; turns Blackbeard the pirate into a fearsome voodoo adept, and imbues an old-fashioned swashbuckler with enough eldritch horrors to fill several issues of the original *Weird Tales*. Like *The Anubis Gates*, Powers's new book is a historical-SF-horror-fantasy-adventure ("Oh, one of those," you say), this time set in the West Indies of 1718, during the bloody twilight of both freebooting and magic. It's an original notion, but what makes this more than just the prose equivalent of the "Pirates of the Caribbean" ride at Disneyland (which, incidentally, I rode three times) are Powers's usual strengths: intricate plotting, a keen sense of the grotesque, outlandish situations, and believable characters.

Particularly memorable is a nightmarish expedition through the Florida swamps in search of the Fountain of Youth, which turns out to be an unsettling, almost Lovecraftian place deep in the heart of unreality, where flowers spring from spilled blood and the voices of the dead speak through mouths of deformed fungi. In short, a place better read about than visited in person.


Not that the book is perfect, granted. The final third (after the return from the Fountain) goes on rather too long, with Shandy going through so many reverses of fortune, from victory to defeat and back again, that the reader may well rebel against such shameless manipulation. In addition, despite obvious efforts to give the poor

heroine some spunk, Beth Hurwood remains nothing more than an object to be rescued and/or victimized throughout; an instance in which *Tides* does not improve on its pirate-movie roots.

To the degree that Powers has defined his own genre, the historical-SF-ecotera, it's tempting to evaluate this only in the context of the author's own output (which is to say, not quite as extravagantly convoluted as *The Anubis Gates*, but more, er, "high-Powered" than either *Dinner at Deviant's Palace* or *Forsoke the Sky*). Peering beyond the hyphens, though, we can see that it is best judged as a horror novel.

Why horror and not fantasy? If, as Barbara Hambly suggested at a recent convention, the difference between horror and contemporary fantasy (and, by extension, historical fantasy) is that fantasy protagonists are more resourceful than their counterparts in horror, who tend to end up as demon fodder, then this sure doesn't look like horror. Jack Shandy and his piratical cohorts don't panic in the face of supernatural evil; they even learn a few magical tricks of their own.

And yet, even the magic utilized by the Good Guys is essentially malign, drawing its power from blood and pain. There's no Gandalf in this cosmology, no Glinda the Good. And the fact remains that all the peak moments in the book—the discovery of the Fountain, the appearance of a ghost ship peopled by undead sailors, the final battle against Blackbeard—are undeniably horrific in both intent and execution. There's more to this fantasy-vs.-horror business, I think, than merely the relative survival skills of the characters involved. There's also the matter of mood, and *emphasis*.

True, *Tides* has more high adventure than your standard modern horror novel, and more power to it for that reason. Who needs another imitation of Stephen King or Peter Straub? *On Stranger Tides* delivers chills and imagination. 

Flow, My Tears...

continued from page 1

about as meaningful as the plot of *Aida* or *Il Trovatore*, at least when looked at against the intricate and insidious oppressions we must actually deal with, day to day: a world where a Big Brother interested or astute enough to watch any of us almost seems like something from Utopia.

I've missed some SF theater works various people have claimed were very good—most notably the musical *Star Struck*, which has left its traces in the glorious comics of the same name by Michael Kaluta.

But the most characteristic theatrical attempt at SF I know is—alas—the most abysmal. It was a one-act play done by a struggling and energetic acting company in the Triangle Theater at Long Island University—also in the summer of 1987. The actors—Bette Carlson and Tom Reid—playing the main characters were wonderfully talented. The director, the supremely inventive Cynthia Belgrave, had already brought electric life to Eliot's verse drama *The Confidential Clerk*, a racy black musical based on *Measure for Measure* called *Tusk*, and a pristine and classic production of *Othello*. That evening, Ms. Belgrave and her actors managed to pull humor and humanity from lines as wooden as it is possible to write in North American English. ("But what, now that the revolution has been discovered, can we possibly do?") The play was called, without a shred of irony, *Sci Fi*—could a characteristic work have a more characteristic title? Its story is simple:

In the Future, People Are Oppressed. The folks who run society live in houses where they are observed by TV cameras, which instruct them in exercises and chastise them when they do anything wrong. They are not allowed to do any manual work. They can only consume. They have no sex and use some vague electronic means to get pleasure, during which they Do Not Touch. Their children are brought up Somewhere Else in test tubes.

A vast working class exists to serve these "managers." The

managers control them and despise them. These "proles" have normal (strictly heterosexual, of course) sex and reproduce by biological means. But they are not allowed to know any history nor anything about how the world functions. They are surveyed by the same TV cameras.

A "prole," Rick, comes to fix the plumbing of the beautiful but repressed manager's wife, Sheila. (Manager's wives don't, apparently, manage very much.) Rick is a member of a revolutionary group, however. He and Sheila argue about freedom and life. And when Rick tells her about Real Love, Sheila falls right into it with him. Sheila begins to preach revolution to her friends among the other managers' wives. But Rick and his revolutionary friends are discovered. Defying the omnipresent TV cameras, Sheila hides Rick in her home. But as Rick leaves to join the other revolutionaries at last, the TV cameras discover them—he gets away just in time. But Sheila is captured:

Lights flash...

Men in white march in and drag her, screaming, across the stage, while...

Electrodes are attached to her head...

Sheila is taken away to be brainwashed. Only for some reason it doesn't quite work.

Meanwhile, pretending to do manual work in a public park, Rick is expressing his doubts to another revolutionary, when, suddenly, they are both killed by the soldiers—just as Sheila arrives to join him.

Sheila is now (of course) pregnant by Rick, which is why the brainwashing didn't take...something about hormones. Sheila vows to raise their (of course) son to foment the revolution once more and reinstate the joys of Real Freedom and Real Love, when he is born.

The end.

The script is deadly serious, incidentally, from first to last. But because it was a small company, I got a chance to talk to the author

of *Sci Fi* at the cast party after opening night.

Did she like science fiction?

Not particularly, she confessed.

Had she read much of it?

No, she explained (a bit embarrassed, because I had been introduced to her as a science fiction writer). Not really.

Well, I asked, still trying to be polite, how had she come to write her play?

Well, she answered back, she'd been watching some old sci fi flick on TV at two in the morning a couple of years back—she wasn't sure of the title. But, she assured me, it didn't really matter. (She'd read *1984* and *Brave New World* back in, respectively, high school and college.) Suddenly, there in the speaker's murmur and the screen's glimmer, it hit her. She had leaped from the couch, she told me, struck by the realization, to stand, stunned, in the center of her living room.

Terrible Things were likely to happen to Freedom and Love in the Future—Our Future—if We Didn't Do Something!

And this, she'd realized, was what sci fi, all sci fi, was really—really and truly—about...hence her title.

In a messianic fervor, over the next three days, through four intense sittings her play had erupted onto the pages passing through her typewriter.

The dangers to Freedom and Love, she repeated to me, somewhat breathlessly—that's what sci fi has been warning the world about for years! And this was what, in her play, it had become her burning wish to tell those who hadn't heard that warning yet.

"I've written a lot of other plays," she explained. "Not too many of them have been produced. But nothing like *Sci-Fi* before. It was certainly the most exciting one to write. Really, it came just like that: a pure bolt of naked understanding. But you," she finished, "you keep talking about SP. Now what, exactly, is that supposed to be...?"

As I took the Number One home from Brooklyn, to stop in with a friend and catch a Mexican dinner in the Village that night, I

pondered: for all their attempts to ground their novels in lucid poetic observation, in trenchant social insight, in a harsh portrayal of economic realities, that's probably how it had struck Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell, too...

But putting it on the stage involves a certain risk.

Act I: In the Future

This summer (1988) the famed Mabou Mines company, a theater collective that has traditionally pitched its work at the experimental edge of drama, has decided to take that risk and, to that end, has mounted an elegant production of Linda Hartman's adaptation of Philip K. Dick's SF novel (not at all "sci fi"), *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*.

The play uses TV screens: scenes take place on one or more of them, and sometimes slide right out onto the stage to be taken over by the actors we were just watching on tape. It uses scrim at one point a character (the Policeman of the title, Felix Buckman, played by the paunchy, patriarchal Frederick Neumann) takes a pleasure ride in his personal flying car, delivering a monologue against a backdrop temporarily become a stage-wide movie screen lit with the tilting lights of night-time Los Angeles, filmed from some small aircraft. At another, texts are flashed in white letters over the blackened scenery, read out by the taped voices of men and women.

The lighting and the acting are both skillful. Bill Raymond's direction is sensitive and sharp. Clearly the production had the funding to do pretty much what it wanted with the theater space at the NYU Tisch School of the Arts, where the show ran from late June through early July 1988. The script was almost entirely the words of Dick, arranged from the novel by Linda Hartman. (As a young girl in L.A., Hartman was the "dark-haired girl" in Dick's life). In no way was the Dick novel on which the play was based a simple re-telling of "what sci-fi, all sci-fi, is really—really and truly—about."

In fact, in all its elements, the production is so good, it make a fine laboratory in which to analyze what happens when one of the newest of western genres (science fiction) is grafted onto one of the oldest (serious theater): because, while the novel is *not* about "what all sci-fi is" really about, the play slides dangerously towards being about just that.

How does such a blending of high-quality elements list and lean—if it does not directly lead—to such a cliché?

To answer that, we must look not only at particular elements and images from the play, but we must explore the options the audience has to interpret them. So join me in the Tisch auditorium as the house lights dim, and, silently, we focus our attention on the stage...

Image one:

A couple of years ago a trade paperback in which Paul Williams expanded his extensive original interviews with Philip K. Dick from *Rolling Stone* was published by Arbor House: *Only Appearance Real*. The cover was a striking painting, its hues laid on as smoothly as with an airbrush. A stylized Phil Dick sits in a chair near an open window, reading. A floor lamp stands beside him. A file cabinet sits in the corner.

And *Something is Coming Through The Window*...

A mudfly-printed version of the painting had appeared in *Rolling Stone* when a fragment of the interviews had been printed there as an article in the mid-seventies.

An earlier production of the play by Mabou Mines reproduced the painting as its poster.

At the start of the play, in the Tisch Auditorium, visible between black curtains, a small sub-stage contains a chair, a floor lamp, an open window. Though the file cabinet is not in evidence, the lighting director (Anne Millette) has gone to some pains to reproduce the intense, aniline hues of that cover painting.

The person who sits reading in the chair, however, is not Dick—but a woman: short, dark hair, beige skirt, tan blouse, sensible shoes...The program identifies her as Mary Anne Dominick (played by Honora Fergusson), a potter from the novel. I'm quite sure that most of the audience unfamiliar with Dick's book, however, assumed she represented the author of the play. (In a previous production in Boston Hartman herself took this part.) The ones who

New from Samuel R. Delany

WAGNER/ARTAUD

A Play of 19th & 20th Century Critical Fictions

"Were two men more alike in their designs on an audience, in their desire to thrust theater, even art itself, to the horizon of its time, then Shatter that horizon, to call up new images, sounds, emotions at the behest of spectacle? There is at least one level where—cruel, after all [Artaud explains to us in *The Theater and Its Double*, not because of its violence or its pain but because of its rigor, its demand for committed audience attention, for artistic dedication—Artaud's Theater of Cruelty is the performance site for Wagner's Total Artwork, the Gesamtkunstwerk.

"Were two men more dissimilar in the material reality of their artistic productions, in the immediate effect of that art on the world?"

A tour de force inquiry into (among many other things) Richard Wagner, theatrical history, the 1848 Dresden Uprising, Antonin Artaud's last days, and the 19th century's invention of High Art. In the play of Delany's "critical fictions" there arises a narrative as energetic and fascinating as the best SF.

After selling out our first edition Ansatz Press is pleased to return *Wagner/Artaud* to print. Paperback: ISBN 0-945195-01-X, \$9.00 plus \$1.00 shipping. Dealer inquiries welcome. 75 Fairview #20, New York, NY 10040.

recognize the setting from the book cover would be sure of it. (It's the "author's" chair.) The ones who see it only as an image without a source probably make the same assumption—just without the conviction. And even as the poster, she is certainly an "artist" figure. This little sub-stage begins to revolve slowly as the lights go down.

Image two:

Behind a scrim, a small platform now moves forward, on which, in a voluptuous position on a polar bear skin, a woman reclines in a gold dress. Anyone who knows Dick's novel and who also remembers the "in order of appearance" cast list from the program will know that this is Alyse Buckman, the true subject—in all senses—of Dick's story. But as readers of the stage picture alone, we know only that her gilded décolletage and stylish black hair (the part is played by the glorious, glamorous, and infinitely stylish Black-Eyed Susan) are the opposite of the first woman we have seen. Between the softer lighting, the odalisque pose, the white muzzle glaring from the platform's corner, the glimmering gold cloth, and her wholly frozen position behind the scrim, it's hard not to read this second image as a savage fantasy, somehow immobilized, of the first—perhaps it's even the writer's (i.e. Hartman's) alter ego. So far these two images suggest that all takes place in someone's mind.

But Dick's? Hartman's?

Does it matter?

Image three:

Suddenly, full and glaring, the lights come up on an area of playing space practically in front of the audience's first row. With great energy, a man and a woman are winding up a TV variety show. They launch into their closing number, "I'm All Fucked Up Over You!"

Here is the first indication of anything specifically science fictional. (Only a few who know Dick's novel very well are likely to remember that these lyrics are not from the book.) At the same time we have our first *generic* problem in how to read what we are seeing, what we are hearing.

The actress's bouffant suggests the fifties. It towers over the male actor's head a good six inches. The actor's zoot suit suggest a style even older. But because of the song lyric ("I'm all fucked up over you; I'm all fucked up over you..."), we know this is not a TV show from our own epoch—at least according to the usual codes SF would bring into play, were this a written text.

Is this a portrayal of a future where clothing styles have reverted to the 'fifties and 'thirties at the same time as restrictions on rock lyrics have reached the same looseness as we now have in movie dialogue—or, indeed, in the theater—at least in the experimental theater of the sort we're watching now?

"I'm all fucked up over you..." Rocking back and forth, into their mikes the actors belt the intricate and pleasing rock melody, with smiles that are pure show-biz.

Yes, we are in a theater, a theater where codes of interpretation apart from those of written science fiction, hold sway—theater where all deviations from a baseline realism are to be taken, not as representations of historical development beyond our own (as in science fiction), but rather as socio-psychological commentary on precisely the "real" that those deviations obscure.

"I'm all fucked up over you..." With a manic insistence that makes the audience laugh, the actors are still singing.

The towering, awkward actress, the absurdly mousy actor, the way the two are belting their asses off like wildly displaced vaudevillians, their gaudy clothes, their characters' obliviousness to their own absurdity (for the audience is laughing at them now, as—certainly—the director hoped they would be); don't these images and notes and words represent a truth that lies beneath the reruns of *The Sonny and Cher Show*, of old *Carol Burnett* repeats?

Following Northrop Frye, John Clute once suggested that science fiction was a form of Menippean satire. Certainly on the stage it becomes so: but the difference in affect, of the same material on the stage and on the page, is what, more than anything, suggests that, on the page (where the affect is other), it's not.

Can the audience read the images as both representative of historical development (the science fictional reading) and, at the same time, the revealed, absurd truth (satire) of the past?

Again, I think that on the page such a complex reading is available.

But I would maintain that it is not available on the stage—at least not if the audience laughs.

And certainly I laughed at this opening number—only haunted, only uncomfortable, only curious about the earlier images (the two women) that seemed to stand outside any narrative organization that, as yet, I could get a hold on.

But the song is over.

Having moved out of the spotlight, the two actors stand now in a space that represents the off-camera backstage, wiping their faces with towels—as the performance within a performance evokes another theatrical code, whose provenance runs from Shakespeare's plays within plays (which renders the framing play the "real") through Pirandello (whose twist on this is to render the actor's creation of the character the imaginary act to be represented on the stage)—and a bitchy dialogue ensues. The long and short of it is that he, TV personality Jason Taverner (played by Greg Mehten), is going to see an old girlfriend, Marilyn Mason (played by Karen Young), who has called him. And his guest star for the evening and current girlfriend, Heather Hart (played by Ann Shea), is not happy about it.

But Jason goes off to see his old flame...and the rank of TV monitors rolls forward:

Jason addresses the upper TV screen. Actress Karen Young's face comes on: we are watching a representation of a video intercom system, running from an apartment lobby to the rooms upstairs. Apparently the image runs two ways. There is only the slightest bit of science fiction here—since such one-way TV images, from the lobby into the house, are commonplace today at a certain economic level.

But here the technology of the stage production—which uses a real 21-inch TV monitor—obscures precisely what would allow us to read the technology of a particular historical epoch: the size, clarity, and framing of the image that the visitor would receive in the lobby is withheld from the audience. Architecture and any other tell-tale materiality in this otherwise very rich production is left to the imagination—which means that the specifically SF layer of the story is what we are not getting. That, of course, is precisely the layer through which a good set designer provides an outsized portion of the visual pleasure to be garnered from the screen as the most mindless SF film sweeps through its mindless plot—a pleasure that most meticulous stage designer can not offer the audience, if only because there are no close-ups to convey the intricacy and coherence of detail that suggests the greater world outside the frame, the world beyond the proscenium.

Jason goes upstairs, i.e., off stage.

The rest of the scene comes over the TV screen—we oversee it, really, as if the lobby monitor were accidentally left running.

On the screen:

Jason enters the bare, white apartment, jacket over his shoulder. (It's summer in the city, it's hot.) A year ago dumped for Heather, and also not happy, Mason tells Jason she has something to show him. It's some sort of bubbling mess in an aquarium. "I see," comments Jason, "why you couldn't explain it to me over the phone."

Suddenly Young picks up the hideous stuff and throws it at him.

Now we have one of the more effective special effects of the show. The stuff hits Jason in the chest and face and clings to him. Up against a white wall, Jason tries to pull it off, but it leaps back viciously. How's it done? Fairly quickly we figure that the video camera has been rotated 90 degrees. The wall Jason is backed against is really the floor. The mass of wet string and crepe paper he pulls forward from his chest and face is really being lifted straight into the air. Its tendrils whip and writhe from an off-camera electric fan blowing straight down. When Jason releases it, it falls back down on his face and chest—only with the image rotated, instead of falling it appears to leap forward at him: wind and gravity alone are creating this image of animated viciousness.

I specify the apparatus behind this thirty seconds of videotape because, for most of the audience, the effect is precisely that of an image—for one moment incomprehensible, for another slightly

horrific—which, over a few moments more, unravels in the mind into precisely the mechanism of its creation....

You watch it. It looks slightly horrible, slightly mysterious. Then, over the next seconds, you figure out how it's done. Any number of scenes in any number of Cocteau films proceed in the same way. A naive theory of interpretation says that we suspend this analysis and let ourselves see only the nasty alien glop, leaping through the air at Jason's face. We see only Jason, his face a mask of strain and terror, pulling it free again. But of course we see nothing of the kind. Or rather, we see both the character (standing upright against the wall, menaced by writhing black tentacles) and the actor (on his back, dropping and lifting black string from his face and chest again and again) superimposed. (Both are, of course, interpretations.) But it is the superimposition that creates the scene's effect.

Some of the audience goes, "Oh..." with appreciative wonder. A few others giggle.

Most, however, remain silent, because, superimposed on the two other interpretations is an overriding one that springs from the medium itself: after all, this is only a video image in the midst of a live performance.

This is perhaps the place to comment that theater is traditionally the art of presence, of materiality, of the real—that is, everything in the theater is material actuality. Only what that actuality represents is imaginary. Therefore theater is the ideal medium by which to manifest the reality of imaginary things. In the theater, the dead speak. Imaginary characters and fancied spirits are given bodies and voices. "What I am," the theater always says, "does not exist. Yet here I stand, with flesh, blood, a costume on, and spouting a regional accent. Deny me if you can."

By the same token, it is extremely difficult for the theater to manifest the unreality of real things. When an actor says, "I, the actor, am not here," it is not that the image belies his statement; it is simply that we know the actor is lying. To anticipate ourselves just a little, any reader of Dick's novels knows that it is the unreality of the real that is precisely Dick's great theme. Thus we can almost predict a manifest tension between Dick's material and this medium—live theater—that he probably never would have thought to present his vision in.

The unreality of the real—Dick's theme—is, rather, the message of the mass-produced, the mechanically reproduced, the endlessly repeatable, arts: writing, film, photography, TV. They are the arts of pure image, where the original is simply a fleeting and disposable phase that leads toward an eternally reproducible simulation, which is the actual (or should we perhaps say virtual) object of our contemplation. For in these arts, unlike painting, sculpture, and theater, there are only virtual objects. There are no real ones.

In the Tisch auditorium, as the audience emerges from the image on the TV monitor of an actor lifting a mop of gunk from his face and chest and dropping it, the lights darken. An ambulance siren sounds, and Jason—the real actor, again on stage—is being wheeled into a hospital.

When the lights come up, we are introduced to what is, finally (after all these frames within frames within frames) the kernel situation of the play: Jason Taverner, famous TV celebrity, wakes in the hospital after having been attacked by an alien in his ex-girlfriend's apartment...and no one knows who he is. That is, no one knows he's a famous TV celebrity. Nor, apparently, have they ever heard of his TV show.

When he walks down the street, people do not flock to get his autograph.

When he tells people who he is, they do not get all flustered and say, "Oh, gosh, I mean...Gee...Oh, wow. Yeah? No.../Really? Oh, wow!"

He does not pass people whistling his records on the street. These negative experiences are quite ordinary for you and me. But for Taverner they suggest that the world is seriously out of joint. Jason calls his agent.

His agent has never heard of him. Jason calls his guest of last evening, Heather. How, she demands as she gets out of the shower (again over the TV intercom), does a little nerd fan like him have her private number? She doesn't know

who he is any more than his agent.

Jason proceeds to tell her things that only he could know—which only confirms for her the insidiousness of fans who would swipe such personal data.

The irony hangs there: is Jason actually a paranoid—a crazy man with delusions of grandeur?

Or rather that irony is there for the Dick reader.

But it's not very strong for the stage audience. As I said, in the theater everything is real. And we have—really—seen Jason sing his hit song with Heather. And there is another theatrical code that goes back at least to Aristotle's perception of the unities:

In the theater, everything will be explained.

The remainder of the play focuses on Jason's greater or lesser involvement with four women, each played with pyrotechnical individuality by, respectively, Susan Berman, Ruth Maleczek, Black-Eyed Susan, and Honora Fergusson.

The first is the woman he goes to in order to get some new identity cards forged. She believes his story about being famous—she never watches TV herself. She gives herself to him, though her first love is for her husband, away at the government forced labor camps. Only, we learn, her husband is probably dead; but she has refused to accept the fact, even as she goes from man to man, telling each of her undying love, between bouts of forging new identities for those who need new ones. Her own grip on reality is so loose that having her believe him is more likely a confirmation of Jason's insanity than not.

The second woman is an old girlfriend of Taverner's, who's dwelling in bars, aging, and on her way to alcoholism. Taverner knows all about her—they lived together for three years. But, when he picks her up at the place he knows she still drinks, she doesn't remember him at all. Still, there's something about him that she...likes. They discuss their mutual friends that he knows and that she wonders how he could possibly know. Finally, back at her apartment, in a scene in which comedy and pathos compete for the audience's emotions, she rubs his crotch while telling him a tale—really quite moving—about a small, furry animal—and the cops break in...

Lights flash...

The woman screams ("No, no—don't send me to Los Angeles. I hate Los Angeles!").

Men in white are strapping electrodes to her head, taking her away...Visually it was almost a replay of the arrest of Winston Smith and Julia in last summer's 1984—not to mention *Sci Fi*. It's so similar, in fact, my first thought was that the director intended it as a theatrical quote, much as his first tableau had quoted—or visually paraphrased, at any rate—the Williams bookcover.

But the lights came up.

Act One was over.

No, I realized, as I rose to stretch and take a stroll in the lobby: this was just one of those easy effects you can drop in, after a comic turn on sexual love, after a moving tale about something small and funny, to start suggesting that if we don't do Something, freedom and love will be in danger. All it meant was that, in the midst of his SF project, the director had let his theatrical invention flag.

Act II "If This Goes On..."

The second act begins with a replay of the final clichéd seconds of Act One ("...I hate Los Angeles!"), just to confirm your reading, in case you thought you'd just seen something meaningful. And Jason travels on into the lives of two more women.

The first in Act Two is Alys Buckman—the one in the gold dress behind the scrim. She is glamorous, earthy, sexy, slangy—and she seems to know who he is! She even has one of his records—sorry: one of his compact disks. Taking him to her mansion, she gives him some mesecine, while he sits on that couch with that bearskin rug over the back. (You remember the bearskin.) As the drug comes on, she leads him through a drugged hall of mirrors, made mostly of language. Then, behind the scrim once more, she suddenly turns into a skeleton and collapses.

She is death and decadence; she is too much knowledge; she is

sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, getting their just deserts.

The skeletal transformation is, of course, a reference to one of the more common drug experiences. Under most hallucinogens, if you look too long at someone's face, or hand, or body, the details seem to fall apart. The experience is much like watching something decay, and you find yourself staring at the skull beneath the skin. It's a visual response similar to the auditory one by which, when a word is repeated enough times, it loses all connection with its meaning and becomes pure noise. Warned that this response is likely to happen, when it does you can usually shrug it off with a blink or two, a change of position, or by looking at something else for a while (but not by staring harder). Sometimes, though, in those who are caught by it unawares, it can be pretty unsettling the first time it happens.

Dick was, during his fifty-two years of life, a committed drug user—especially of the amphetamines. And he was certainly familiar with the psychedelic pharmacopeia. The irony of the scene in his novel is that, here, the transformation is not a hallucination. The skeleton (like everything we see in the theater) is real. Yet even when the policeman's assistant walks into his chief's office with the skeleton in his arms a scene later, most of the audience—I suspect—is relating to it neither as an ironic comment on a more universal aspect of the drug experience nor as a literal skeleton. To the theater audience it is a material symbol that represents a moral maxim: sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll will get you in the end. It might have worked far more effectively if, instead of replacing the actress—at the moment of epiphany—with a real skeleton (the lights flicker, Jason cries out; the actress steps behind a curtain and a skeleton is revealed to be hanging behind her—we have no trouble reading the replacement as a transformation), the director had replaced her with, say, the projected image of a skeleton—which Jason then runs up to and relates to, in actorly fashion, as if it were real—touching it, picking it up, dropping it, relating to its texture and belf, before terror overwhelms him and he flees the house...then, when, a scene later, the assistant walks into the office carrying a real skeleton (which the audience will read as the same skeleton it saw in projection), a level of image mode, drug state, and hallucination and reality misread-as-hallucination will have maintained a proper theatrical alignment—an alignment that would have dramatized Dick's irony and even, perhaps, forestalled some of the moralizing effect, by keeping the representation hanging on one image fibrillating between two modes of representation. But if there is a general criticism to be made of this production, it is that there seems to be no fine realization of the way in which the audience will read its parody of various image modes—film, slide, TV, inanimate prop, live actor. Rather we move from one to the other only for variety's sake and, now and then (as when a TV monitor is used to suggest an apartment house video intercom), for the most ordinary narrative mimesis.

Thinking he has been poisoned himself by the mescaline, Jason runs into the street. He stops a woman and begs her to take him to the hospital. They enter a coffee shop and, magically, the waitresses—for the first time!—recognize him for the TV star he, and we, know he is. Perhaps he *does* have to go to the hospital after all. His new friend, a potter, gives him a vase she's been carrying around in a box.

On having his identity confirmed, Jason makes some grand gesture to acknowledge the homage due him—and knocks the vase from the table.

It shatters.

Sweetly his new friend gives him another.

And somehow it's all right.

The four passages with the women—each woman more or less deranged—are the ones from Dick's novel (and Hartman's adaptation) that rise to the surface, that remain in memory—all four comical, all four lyrical, all four beautifully and individually acted, from this very complicated play. But each is interrupted and interspersed with connecting scenes and transition sections, in which we learn the real, Dickian plot.

There's a wonderful scene in a restaurant with Susan Berman and a bunch of really creepy waiters, some of whom are just trying to make in on Jason and make a play for his date—and one of whom really is a government spy. Nurses in the hospital become waitresses

The God Within the Stone

In darkness, heat and pressure scheme
Within the rock. The ancient sand compressed
Recalls to life the missing shore. As in a dream,
The rains seep in to cut and cross,
and storms so long suppressed
Restore again the breath once lost
to the god within the stone.

By green light, the oaks and elms beseech;
Their branches tremble. Beneath them in the ground
There beats a rhythm, as of waves along a beach.
Its sense bestrewn their movement,
their roots recall the sound.
Inside them pulses ocean sent
by the god within the stone.

Near morning, the frightened hunter broods
Beside a stump. The ten-point stag he chased
Turned pale and vanished in the woods,
While owls stuttered in the night
as though they feared the trace
That moonlight, rain and strata hid from sight.
For breath has issued from that ethnic face
As the hunt disturbed the sleeping pace
Of the god within the stone.

—Jim Young

in a coffee shop with limp theatrical malleability. And in any number of further transition scenes, we learn that the government and the police are both after Tavener. Drugs are involved. So are murders—some of which Tavener is being framed for. The police chief, Felix Buckman, has been having a life-long incestuous affair with his twin sister, Alys—yes, the one in the gold dress who alone seems to know what's going on. They even have a three-year-old son in Florida, named Buckley. Soon we learn that a particularly new and powerful hallucinogen has been developed, that makes whomever takes it able not only to experience unreality, but to change reality itself.

Was it Jason who took the drug—unknowingly, perhaps?

No, it was Alys—who took it very much on purpose.

But...

It seems that Alys was always fascinated with Tavener; she was his greatest fan. When she took the drug, she brought herself and the real Tavener into this alternate universe where she could be alone with him, i.e., where nobody else would recognize him and know who he was.

In short, the whole world of the story was a figment of Alys's imagination—hence her dreaming figure on the bearskin, among the opening scenes.

But the drug (the police assistant, carrying the skeleton in his arms, goes on to explain to Police Chief Buckman) speeded up her metabolism so that, when she finally got Jason alone in the mansion, she simply died of a sudden attack of old age and immediately went on to become a skeleton. Her twin brother, Felix, is distraught and vows to destroy Jason—he'll accuse him of murdering Alys. But somehow her death begins to release them all back into their own world...

It's even more complicated than that, actually—there's a whole

running bit about levels of eugenic maneuvering ("Were you born a six or a seven?") that—more or less the whole point—never really means anything at all. But this, at least, is a sketch of what's going on. Still, to make that sketch, we've had to elide precisely those images and effects that inscribe them on plot. In the first act, for example, there's an interview between policeman Felix Buckman and Taverner. For if Jason is seated in an old-fashioned wheeled wooden office chair. Buckman has Taverner in chains. As Buckman threatens and cajoles Taverner, trying to get him to cooperate, he wheels Taverner's chair around the stage, now swinging him—at the end of the chain—this way, now swinging him that.

In a realistic play, it might be an acceptable touch of expressionism, underlining the extent that Buckman has the bewildered Taverner in his control. As an expressionistic effect, it takes an imaginary relation between the two characters and manifests in a dramatic reality between the two actors. In short, it's good theater. In a science fiction play, however, it still reads strangely. We, the audience, are trying to learn how this world works. How much of this chain scene, then, is supposed to be real and how much is supposed to be surreal—the scene comes, remember, in the same play in which two TV stars sang, yes, "I'm All Pucked Up Over You."

Do people in this future drag each other around the room in chains as a matter of course...?

Finally, though, the audience reads it neither as real nor as surreal but simply as theater. Presumably this is what Mabou Mines (or director Raymond) wanted. But such moments all through the production give a feel of fragmentation to the evening, as if these various moments belonged to different plays, different genres, different modes. What we miss is a sense of the play's portraying a single and coherent universe—however different from our own—that is any larger than the stage.

In another scene, Felix and his twin sister Alys (though, at this point, we don't know they're related) make love—if you can call it that. She is drugged and comatose, in her gold dress. In his tie and brown suit, he lies with her, fondles her, and delivers one of his obsessed monologues. The platform the two of them lie on moves slowly toward the front of the stage, in the dark, as he speaks. (The scene where Ruth Rae fondles Taverner will vaguely mirror it.) But the audience has no way to grasp the level of reality the scene represents. Clearly it is a symbol of Felix Buckman's sexuality—but a symbol very much of the mode Arthur Symons described in 1895: "A symbol is a representation that does not aim at being reproduction." But—when presented in visual terms—science fiction operates almost wholly at the level of reproduction, even when it is the reproduction of unreal, or symbolic, objects. A symbolic brother making symbolic love to a symbolic sister may be the stuff of Melville's *Pierre*, but the material reality, attitudes, and actions of real actors miming love as it might occur at a certain social level between brother and sister would have been more revealing of the workings of this particular world—and thus better science fiction.

The skeletal transformation of Alys, at her death, is given (as I've said) a more or less acceptable science fictional rationale—though it does sound dumbly on even the most casual hearing. Yet even a brilliant piece of SF exposition could not obscure the symbolic alignment of Alys, drugs, sexual transgression, and death: and it's certainly she, more than any else, who finally leaves us at the threshold of the warning *Sci-Fi* so grandly and bathetically presented us:

"If this goes on, Real Love is in Danger."

In the same way, her brother's totalitarian police tactics—along with those of all his minions and assistants—bring us to the same warning about "Real Freedom."

SF / Sci-Fi

Which is to say, once again, despite its TV screens, its electronically distorted voices, and its occasionally filmed backdrops, *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* largely ends up eschewing the specifically SF level of its story, so that when, now and again, Hartman's characters make reference to things happening on other planets, or when "the situation on earth" is mentioned, reminding us

this is all taking place in an interplanetary future, the phrases, instead of opening up the world of the play in such a way as to let us see beyond the theatrical frame, just jar or sound awkward—if not silly. For all the production's invention, little of it has been expended on making the specifically science fictional level of the material vivid, coherent, or even visible. At the same time it takes up a plot whose ideological reduction is a pretty grim one, and not a very new one. In genres more conducive to SF than theater, it is that specifically SF level that subverts ideology, that makes us believe for a moment that something else is possible—that, perhaps, the "plot" is only a bad dream, not even of the author's but of the larger commercial field the author was, so often, writing to, in an otherwise wonderful and marvelous SF world.

Dick's tale has its provenance within the field of written SF, and it's worth looking at it for a moment. The conceit that you and your world are actually a figment of somebody else's imaginings most strongly evokes Theodore Sturgeon's justly famous 1948 story from *Weird Tales*, "It Wasn't Syzygy." In the Sturgeon story, a young man who drives a bulldozer, who plays the guitar, and who in general has an extraordinarily vivid and specific sensory life, tells how he meets the absolutely perfect woman: everything about him, about his life and personality, is something that she is entranced with. And to him, she is almost heart-stoppingly beautiful. But finally, as things progress, the young man learns that there are only a few real people in the world—no more than a dozen. Everybody else is a projection of these few people. The idea that his perfect woman is really only a kind of masturbatory fantasy come to life drives him to distraction—until he learns, in a final moment, that it is not she who is his fantasy; rather it is he who is hers. But a number of other stories (most notably Heinlein's classic "They," in which the world turns out to be a large movie set for a bunch of inscrutable aliens) pursue the theme of the unreality of the real, well before Dick brought the particular vantage to it provided by hallucinogenic drugs and a social surface constructed of nothing but innumerable repeated simulations—furniture, appliances, architecture, tools—without any real originals. But when this theme is transferred to the stage, a medium whose claim to our attention is that each one of its limited, perishable performances is precisely an original (it's the reproduced and reprinted simulation of the text that is the tool to effect an "original performance"), there is almost no way to hear either the historic theme itself or Dick's particular set of variations on it that make it his own.

The epilogue to Dick's story is given in white letters projected in slides across the blackened stage. Various voices read out to us the fates of the various characters, even the fate of the vase—and, most memorably, of little Bucky: eventually he became a policeman like his father. But at twenty-three he fell from a substandard fire escape, was paralyzed from the waist down, and spent the rest of his life collecting old TV commercials. It's both grim and amusing, as is much of Dick. But at the same time, this retreat into such a spectacularly written text (a selection from the novel, incidentally, wholly without science fictional signs, and thus the safest in literary terms to read in the theater) in a work that has tried so hard to now to be such a purely theatrical experience has the effect of a final, exhausted collapse back into its graphic origins.

It's one of the most effective sequences in the play. Still, it's impossible not to hear Hartman—and/or the director—saying under it: "Okay. I give up. It's a better novel than it is a play. Putting it on the stage just doesn't cut the mustard. Go on, read it." And I wonder if this is what an audience who's just paid thirty-five dollars a ticket for a night at the theater—and with a theater company known for its theatrical daring, at that—wants to hear from such authoritative voices.

The final tableau returns us to the mini-stage of the opening. Now the artist figure, in her chair by the lamp, begins to talk, reading us two letters from Phil Dick. Their topic is the ecological tragedy in the handling of our oceans and our forests—and it's as jarring as those references to other planets. The most placid in the audience squirm under the discomfort of being preached at. The more analytical simply sit there thinking: But that's not what the play's been about. What's this got to do with sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll—which has

been, for better or for worse, the topic of the moral allegory on how you can lose your identity if you live in a world with too much of them, that we've been sitting through. (The general commentary on insanity that provides the running humor of the play says basically the same thing as it does in the old Hogarth etchings *The Rake's Progress*: it's the necessary torment, however much it amuses the tourists come to watch at the gates of Bedlam, before death itself claims the moral transgressor.) The point of the two Dick letters happens to be one I agree with. But I also agree with Eco's mode of approach to haute cuisine (borrowed from the Chinese): lengthy preparation time; brief time cooking. But if that had been the subject of the closing epistles, I would have found it equally out of place.

It is as if using, just here, the letters—and their topical load—answers some vast embarrassment on Hartman's part. Not content to let the evening be a progression of interesting theatrical visions (actually I would have found a disquisition on French—or Chinese—covering less out of place than an ecological sermon, because it concerns the gustatory, the sensual, and is in the historical line of sex, drugs, and music), because it's science fiction it's got to have a message—even if the message doesn't pertain to anything else we've seen. And it doesn't.

"If this goes on..." a science fiction play has got to say, doesn't it? Otherwise, well, it just doesn't feel like...well, like it's saying anything.

The medium of live theater fights, as I've said, against Dick's own major message, leaving it all but unseizable. At best it admits it as an echo only to be made out by those who know his work already. (It's secondary theme, that in such a world as ours kindness itself is the only true sanity, however it comes, is one that here and there the play hints at—though, again, I think it hints most strongly for those who already know it's there.) Is it the absence of the major theme, in all this quintessentially Dick material, that creates the embarrassment that yearns to be filled with this egregious sermon? But without the specifically science fictional level to subvert the moral message

of the plot's liberal ideology, there really isn't too much left except sci-fi.

The above analysis, different for each specific image as it is represented by theatrical rhetoric, accomplishes the overall reduction of the material to that most non-science fictional of themes. Most of that reduction, you'll note, is not done by the authors (Hartman/Dick), but by the very theatrically inventive direction in league with the medium itself: i.e., how we read the real as metaphoric (a real actress replaced by a real skeleton) when it is put before us on the stage.

Well, I'm quite ready for the next science fiction theater piece that comes along to triumph over all these problems—through generic analysis and new theatrical direction as inventive as, or more inventive than, any I've seen to date. When these problems are solved, the work will strike the knowledgeable as both more than SF and other than theater—because the whole set of framing and expectational conventions will have to be largely adjusted. It may even seem dangerous, disturbing, and—bless us—new. But before such problems can be overcome, they will have to be conceived in something like the above terms. Only then can a dramatist really put his or her energy into them, into shattering them, into locating a performance space, a narrative form, the proper framing devices and imagistic modes, in the pursuit of whatever scenic reality (however realistic, however abstract), that does not pull the material back into this old, old form.

Yes, *Flow My Tears* was interesting, even entertaining theater. If we forget that it's set in the future and take all its distortions, science fictional or otherwise, as pure theatrical gestures directed entirely toward the here and now (which is always already the past), then it becomes an often amusing satire with a good Menippean bite.

But if we regard it as any attempt to solve the real problems of presenting SF on the stage, it's...well, still sci-fi.

And that's too bad—only partially because Dick wasn't.

[—Pleasantville, July 1988]

The Goldcamp Vampire by Elizabeth Scarborough

New York: Bantam Spectra, 1988; \$3.50 paperback; 247 pp.

Reviewed by Greg Cox

In an era when most SF and fantasy humor, as practiced by the likes of Douglas Adams, Robert Asprin, Terry Pratchett, Craig Shaw Gardner, and (sometimes) Somtow Sucharitkul, consists of puns, jokes, and *Mad Magazine*-style spoofs, *The Goldcamp Vampire* can seem quite puzzling at first.

I mean, this is supposed to be a comedy, right? Any novel subtitled "The Sanguinary Scoundrel" has to be played for laughs, especially when it features a bloodthirsty Count who prefers the Yukon to Transylvania, a bevy of semi-vampireized dance hall girls who perform at the Rich Vein Opera House, Jack London learning about "the call of the wild" from a talkative lycanthrope, a Scandinavian prospector who turns out to be a werewoman (complete with antlers), and, lest we forget, Valentine Lovelace, the trouble-prone heroine and narrator of Scarborough's earlier novel, *The Drastic Dragon of Draco, Texas*. This time around, Valentine, a would-be novelist whose real name is (egad!) Pelagia Brigid Harper, travels to Alaska at the height of the Gold Rush, where she is immediately, and unjustly, blamed for a series of strangely bloodless murders, and is forced to go undercover as (what else?) an exotic flamenco dancer known as "Corazon, the Belle of Barcelona."

The truth of the matter is that, while this is a funny book, it's not a parody or mere collection of one-liners. (Hell, I only counted one pun!) The humor grows out of the characters, and the deadpan seriousness with which they cope even with something as flagrantly ridiculous as a werewoman. It's the difference between a TV sitcom, with laugh track, and one of those old British comedies starring Alec Guinness. Or, closer to home, this reads more like *The Incompleat Enchanter* than *Samurai Cat*.

Don't get me wrong. *Samurai Cat* is good clean stupid fun, and the best of today's parodists, namely Adams and Pratchett, can occasionally reach heights of giddy invention worthy of Monty

Python. But if you go into *The Goldcamp Vampire* expecting the same sort of silliness and belly laughs, you're going to be disappointed, which would be a shame since Scarborough offers her own, subtler rewards. Chuckles instead of delicious giggling—or groans.

Foremost among these rewards is Valentine herself, whose lofty prose (and penchant for melodrama) is a continuing source of amusement. For example:

"Though I had secondhand knowledge of a great many intimate practices taking place between man and woman that could have been considered linked to procreation only by the wildest stretch of the imagination, I was not unshockable. Anything above and beyond what I already knew about had to be dreadful indeed...."

Granted, this isn't a gag that lends itself readily to buttons or t-shirts, but an entire narrative written in this style is rather endearing. It's too bad that the epilogue seems to bring Valentine's career, literary and otherwise, to a neat conclusion. She's a delightful heroine, and all the more so because Scarborough isn't above having some fun at her expense.

Vasily Vladovitch Bledinoff, the goldcamp vamp, is not quite so strong a character, but then vampire comedy has always been problematic. Blood, sex, and death—the essence of the *nosferatu*—aren't exactly ripe material for laughs, especially at novel length. Not counting all the children's books about vampire bunnies and such, the prior history of the humorous vampire novel consists of a couple of campy, most forgotten, sex comedies. *Tabitha Tfoolakes*, by John Linssen, was infinitely more sophisticated and wittier than *Dracutwig* by Mallory Knight (Dracu-Twiggy, get it?), and probably more stylish than *The Goldcamp Vampires* well, but both *Tfoolakes* and *Dracutwig* disappeared into obscurity almost immediately. Funny Vampires are, perhaps...well, tooless.

In contrast, Scarborough plays her vampire more or less straight.

The Death of John W. Campbell Considered as a Presidential Assassination

22. Final blackouts. I was in a London cold-water flat listening to Radio Caroline and reading *New Worlds*. *Exile on Main Street* had been playing, and suddenly the announcer broke in with the news. I started laughing uncontrollably and lost my piece. Then I started crying and couldn't stop. Langdon Jones came over and we went out for curry. Neither of us would look the other in the eye. After several drinks I became possessed with the sense that I had to go home and re-read *World of Null-A* as soon as possible. We talked it over and eventually both of us set out from the restaurant, but on the District line we ran into Mike Moorcock who hadn't heard, and once we'd filled him in it seemed more appropriate to get off at Monument station and buy the latest *Analogue*. For overheard, V-formations of B-52s surveyed the city, heading for their vast bases upland. As it happened we couldn't find an open newsstand and had to wait for dawn. Watching the empty streets we spun the unlocked revolving doors leading into the lobbies of government buildings. Every so often we would come across a small clump of people doing roughly the same. Invisibly weeping, they directed us home. (—Patrick Nielsen Hayden)

A renegade son of Dracula, as well as a nephew of Elizabeth Bathory, the infamous Blood Countess of Hungary ("Auntie Elizabeth," as he calls her), Vasily Vladovitch is robustly menacing until almost the very end, when the reader discovers that, yes, he is arrogant and selfish, and too aggressive a suitor for Valentine's tastes, but maybe he's not as nasty as she keeps making him out to be. Rather than weakening the character, the vampire exits the story a much more complicated character than he originally seemed—and without any messy stakings. (On the other hand, the entirely unnecessary sequel that appeared in the Spring 1988 issue of *Argos* as a "Speech from Representative of Fictitious Alaska Visitor's Bureau to the Equally Fictitious Exalted Assembly of Ancient Transylvanian Nobility with Sanguinary Tastes" only proves that some jokes should not be run into the ground, a fondness for one's native soil notwithstanding.)

The Goldcamp Vampire is a novelty item, not an undying (or Undead) classic, but if comedy is the dessert in the grand banquet of literature, and today's funny fantasies are mostly junk food, then this is a slice of chocolate cake among the Gummi Worms and popcicles.

Or, for you vampires out there, it tastes like plasma, not tomato juice. ▶

Frank Dietz Keeping the Fires of Utopia Burning: The Science Fiction Novels of Carl Amery

A few years ago a zealous German SF fan conducted a poll of over 100 other SF fans in Southern Germany, asking them about their favorite texts. The result in the category "best SF novel" was a complete surprise: Carl Amery's *An den Feuern der Leyernmark* (At the Camp-Fires of Leyernmark). Mind you, this was not supposed to be the best German SF novel, and Leyernmark won out over *Dune*, *Ringworld*, and *Stranger in a Strange Land*. This result cannot be attributed to narrow-minded parochialism (Amery is a Bavarian author), as the German SF market is almost entirely dominated by translations from the English. Who is Carl Amery, and why is he so esteemed by some SF fans?

Carl Amery, born in Munich in 1922, is known mainly outside SF circles as a critical Catholic thinker closely associated with the German ecology movement. In the 1970s, when this movement was just beginning, his book *Das Ende der Vorsehung* (The End of Providence) attacked the catastrophic ecological consequences of the biblical command to go forth and multiply. Amery has also campaigned for the Green Party, which has steadily gained influence on the local, state and national level within the last decade.

As a stylist Amery is clearly superior to better-known SF authors like Herbert W. Franke or Wolfgang Jeschke, and his satirical spirit is unsurpassed in German SF. His first novel, *Der Untergang der Stadt Passau* (The Fall of the City of Passau) reads like a pastiche of popular post-doomsday novels, and Amery acknowledges the influence of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* in his preface. It is important, though, that Amery sets the action of the book on Bavarian soil. Throughout the 1950's and 1960's German SF authors had often used English pseudonyms or given their characters English names ("Perry Rhodan"). It is only recently that German SF has come into its own. Amery's "local-color science fiction," as one might call it, marks a phase in that development.

Das Königsprojekt (The Royal Project), Amery's next SF novel, demonstrates his fascination with the question of historical necessity. A group of fanatical Jacobites and Bavarian Royalists attempts to change the course of European history. With the help of the Vatican and a time machine constructed by Leonardo da Vinci they want to undo the deposition of the House of Stuart from the English throne

in 1688. This would make the current Bavarian pretender King of England. The grand project fails, and in the end we find ourselves back in our familiar historical continuum instead of in a unified Catholic Europe dominated by the Bavarian dynasty of Wittelsbach. Amery's tongue-in-cheek style and his ruminations on the intricacies of royal genealogy make this novel a pleasure to read.

An den Feuern der Leyernmark (1976) so far marks the culmination of Amery's work. Once again, history is the subject. Through a bureaucratic mistake the Kingdom of Leyernmark (=Bavaria) becomes one of the most powerful nations in Europe and involuntarily ushers in a utopian age. In 1666, at the eve of the war between Prussia on one side, and Austria-Hungary, Bavaria and a number of smaller German states on the other, a high ranking civil servant in Munich orders 654 "Godfrey Rifles" left over from the American Civil War. He does not know, though, that "rifles" here designates a legion of soldiers. The Leyernmarkian government is totally surprised when a troop of outlaws calling themselves the Free American Legion arrives in Munich. These mercenaries, equipped with rifles of miraculous firepower, turn the tide of the (historical) Austro-Prussian war. Instead of the militaristic Prussian state it is the liberal Kingdom of Leyernmark/Bavaria which becomes the dominant power in Central Europe. The Free American Legion also acts as a catalyst for revolutionary forces brought to the surface during the war. Soon revolutions break out in France and Germany and all of Europe eventually becomes a family tree of free republics. The centennial celebrations of '66 take place in a world where the horrors of the two global wars never happened.

Amery ends his book with a section entitled "Prologue and Lament," posing the central problem of all literary utopias. "How do we, generations too late, reach an inhabitable land, reach Leyernmark? Who will build the bridge? The bridge of indestructible hope..." He refuses to offer an easy solution to this problem, leaving the painful gap between our world and Leyernmark wide open.

This summary is obviously unable to do justice to Amery's linguistic virtuosity, his subtle irony, and his skillful use of regional dialects. It is the latter point which has actually limited the book's reception even within Germany, and it probably remains the greatest obstacle to an English translation. Amery's vision of a humane world, though, stands out as one of the masterpieces of recent German science fiction and would certainly deserve a wider audience. ▶

A hard-science thriller from the bestselling
author of *Eon* and *Blood Music*

GREG BEAR

THE FORGE OF GOD



"A gripping panorama of a world in peril."

—*Chicago Sun-Times*

"One of the most striking novels in modern science fiction."

—*Locus*

"Bear makes a profound and unusual approach to hard science fiction, permitting great depth of characterization."

—*Los Angeles Times*

"The finest novel of alien invasion since Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Footfall*."

—*Chicago Sun-Times*

June 26, 1996: One of Jupiter's moons disappears.

September 28, 1996: A geologist near Death Valley finds a mysterious new cinder cone in a very well-mapped area.

October 1, 1996: The government of Australia announces that an enormous granite mountain has been discovered in Central Australia. Like the cinder cone, it wasn't there six months ago....

Both unexplained objects have passengers who speak English—but they tell completely contradictory stories!

THE FORGE OF GOD is suspenseful, thoughtful and inspiring—a novel about Earth under siege and the stirring response of ordinary people fighting to save our planet!

53167-1/\$4.50/480 pages



a column
Daniel M. Pinkwater Speaks

My father used to say, "I yam no back nornern. I yam a ventier^{er} century man." In fact, he was born a few years short of the present century, but he loved everything modern, and detested anything suggestive of the past. Of course, he had curious ideas about what constituted twentieth century life.

One of his ideas of modernity was to live in a house decorated in light colors with plenty of exotic pets. His taste ran to chihuahua dogs and monkeys—which animals he never brought home, but constantly threatened to, making me a nervous wreck as a kid. I knew a sissy pet could destroy my reputation in the neighborhood.

A shaggy collie, or German Shepherd, was out of the question—too much of a nineteenth century quality to dogs like that. He fantasized constantly about iguanas, giant tortoises, lemurs, and cockatoos, but for years we remained petless.

When he finally took the plunge, it was parrots he chose. This was right after World War Two, in Chicago. Very few people had parrots, and there wasn't a whole lot known about their care—*or* where to get one. My father got one—the first of a number of *Psittaciformes* [sit-ahs-si-formz] we'd own—a double yellow-head Panama named Pedro.

Anyone acquainted with parrots will tell you they're crazy. Intelligent, yes. Affectionate. But also psychotic. Pedro was a self-contained sort of bird, who would tear anyone who approached him to shreds—except my father, of course. He loved my father.

After spending a day amusing himself by vocalizing insanely, and tossing sunflower seed shells in a nine-foot radius around his perch, Pedro would sense my father's imminent arrival, home from work. Pedro knew when my father was precisely thirty

minutes from the front door. At this point he would begin crowing and cooing insistently. This performance would accelerate until he was shrieking and convulsing, flapping and hyperventilating. By the time my father actually came through the door, Pedro would have worked himself into a fit. His feathers awry, his pupils dilating and contracting, he'd be hanging upside down, gripping his perch with one zygodactylous claw.

My father would have to gather Pedro up, and cradle him in his arms, arranging his feathers and comforting him, while Pedro made deranged croaking noises.

Weekends, my father would hang around the house in his underwear. If visitors came, he would put his pants on—if they were friends of his—if not, not.

Pedro had the freedom of the house. He would come careening out of the dining room (Pedro was not a good flier) and land on my father, powerful talons wrapped around his clavicle, a trickle of blood appearing on his undershirt. My father would stroke Pedro.

"Dot's a good boid," he would say, "a good boid."

Pedro fell ill. There wasn't a vet in all of Chicago who dealt with parrots. Besides, it was too cold to risk taking him outside. The zoo vet said it sounded like pneumonia. Keep him warm and give him stimulants.

A cruel fate caused the boiler to quit during Pedro's crisis. Everybody moved into the kitchen to keep warm. My father stayed home from work to nurse him. I remember coming home from school upon this scene: Pedro was wrapped in a dish towel. To immobilize him, my father had made a sort of cradle out of one of those black enamel oval roasting pans. He had Pedro resting on the open oven door, and was in then act of pouring Ballantine's Scotch down Pedro's beak out of a shot glass. Pedro was looking around wildly. What could he have been thinking?

I figure the bird died of fear as much as anything else.



Daniel M. Pinkwater is the author of Fat Men from Space, The Hoboken Chicken Emergency, Young Adults, and many other strange books.

Read This

Recently read and recommended by Larry Nisen

NONFICTION

Chaos: Making a New Science, by James Gleick.

Makes a fine primer. You'll love the illustrations, including an eight-picture expansion of the Mandelbrot set; but you get more than postcards. This is part history, part science, part... well, chaos isn't like other sciences. It's luck. Chaos is so new a discipline that a good primer can put you even with the rest of the field.

Start even with me, too. I don't yet know how to get a story out of this book. Beat me into print!

A Brief History of Time, by Stephen Hawking.

Hawking is one of the brightest minds alive. You'd have to read this anyway, else your peers will consider you semiliterate. But it's lucid, it's honest, it's wonderfully readable and wonderfully wise.

Hawking keeps changing his mind over the years. Jerry Pournelle and I watched him lecture at Cal Tech, when he told the world that quantum black holes (his own theory) won't be around any more because (his more recent discovery) black holes evaporate... and an evaporating black hole leaves behind a naked singularity! He changed his mind about that too, later. The surprise is the ease with which he says so, repeatedly, in this book.

He's always at the edge of the known. His peers must get whiplash trying to follow him.

Infinite in All Directions, by Freeman Dyson.

Like Hawking, Dyson is one of the brightest. (Dyson as in "Dyson sphere.") He'll tell you how to take control of the solar system; but read it if only for Dyson's reactions to the "nuclear winter" hypothesis. No shit, you need to know this.

Mirror Matter, by Robert L. Forward and Joel Davis.

Antimatter is what it's about; antimatter as an industrial tool and particularly as fuel for space missions. It makes nice reading. If you're one of us, you need it as a reference. For every space mission, you'll need to decide whether to use antimatter or settle for a less concentrated power source.

FICITION

Watchmen, by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons.

It was twelve issues as a comic book. Now it can be bought in several formats as one thick comic book. What you've been hearing is true: this is good stuff, worthy stuff. Literature. Soft SF, but harder than most comic fiction. Solid, convincing characterization and culture-building.

There's also considerable blood. Be warned.

—August 6, 1988

Drowning Towers by George Turner

New York: Morrow, September 1988; \$18.95 hardcover, 318 pp.

Reviewed by Patrick Nielsen Hayden

Drowning Towers has been much praised in Britain and in Turner's native Australia (where it appeared as *The Sea and Summer*), and for some pretty good reasons. Little read in North America, Turner is known in his homeland for both mainstream fiction and genre SF; in addition, over the last two decades he has written some of the more notably stringent criticism ever to appear in fanzines.

His latest novel, clearly an ambitious work, manages to evoke credible comparisons to Dickens: a tale of two young boys growing up in the hard big city, struggling upwards from the edge of the abyss. It is the mid-21st century, and the greenhouse effect has progressed for decades; the planet groans with overpopulation, the ice caps are rapidly melting, employment is the privilege of a tiny and only moderately comfortable elite (the Sweet), and almost everyone else is Swill—confined (in Australia at least) to great Ballardian high-rise ghettos where they are fed, clothed, and left to their own devices. At the street level Turner invests impressive and convincing detail in his picture of a future Melbourne slowly sliding into the sea. The older people in *Drowning Towers* aren't People Of The Future, but rather our own selves grown old and sad and nostalgic for the world of, say, 1988. Similarly, the city itself is neither Jetsonland nor a stage set for *Blade Runner*, but instead a palpable place complete with trees, houses, mud, abandoned railroad right-of-ways, and architecture left over from our present and our past.

I suspect, however, that what particularly impresses many readers is Turner's mastery of a sort of grand, sober Heinleinism crossed with the emotional depth of Le Guin. Not since *Starship Troopers* can I recall a novel so full of mentor-figures given to whirling angrily on their charges and delivering themselves of lectures full of hard truths carefully designed to instill an adequate level of clear-eyed tough-mindedness. Yet in Turner's universe, unlike Heinlein's and like Le Guin's, one knows that suffering is real. Heinlein's didactic-but-irresponsible old farts have a relative, as well, in the character of Billy Kovacs, Swill opportunist, reprobate, self-

sacrificing leader, bully, and Font of All Practical Wisdom, at times it almost seems as if Turner has succeeded in merging Heinlein's Competent Man with D. H. Lawrence's Natural Man, a consummation devoutly to be missed.

Maybe that's a cheap line. Then again, I found it an irritating book: impressive on first reading for its sweep and *gravitas*; increasingly disappointing as I reread looking for the sort of depth one associates with Turner's literary affect. Spread though it is across multiple first-person viewpoints, the tale inside the frame never stays too far from the fortunes of the Conways, a Sweet family abruptly consigned to near-Swill status and forced to confront the kind of hardships (and, more crucially, indignities) that most Sweet prefer not to think about. Relocated to a decaying area abutting a complex of Swill high-rises, they are initiated into the protocols of their fallen status by Billy Kovacs, charismatic Swill bossman of a nearby tower block. Much is made of their disorientation, prejudice, and near-hysterical fear; one gathers the average Sweet knows next to nothing about how 99% of the planet's population lives. Yet in order to get the Conways, in particular their two sons, back into the great world of affairs—in other words, in order to construct a big, sprawling novel taking in all levels of society—it must develop, ultimately, that the world isn't actually quite so rigid after all, that the division between Sweet and Swill is by no means so pronounced; that in fact everything and everyone is much more complicated and interconnected than it seems. This being the case, the Conways as portrayed in the first half of the book begin to look less like reasonably intelligent members of their own society, even allowing for the fact that they've been traumatized, and more like walking receptacles for the diverse other characters' expository lumps: nothing else can explain their early ineptitude.

For all the psychological skill with which Turner draws his characters in their day-to-day lives, all too frequently their long-term development reminds one of the character in the legendary Badger Books back novel who, backed into an impossible corner, is

described by the author approximately thus: "Then, suddenly...Did I mention that he had wings? Spreading his wings, he flew away!" The development of the vain and bigoted Teddy Conway into a thoughtful adult, or Mrs. Conway's shift from proud Sweet into comfortable mistress of Billy Kovacs, are only asserted, alluded to, never convincingly *narrated*. By switching first-person voices every few chapters, much is passed as having happened off-stage and in-the-meantime, but plausibility suffers.

Following not one but two lengthy *Bildungsroman* sequences and a hundred-or-so pages of hugger-mugger as the book's diverse characters, united at last, investigate a mysterious plot to use a manmade virus to covertly sterilize the Swill, all efforts come to naught as Teddy and company encounter the true powers behind their world; subsequently, the story trails off into a decade's worth of diary entries sketching out their efforts to redeem the degraded Swill and build a race of New Men through—get this—education! By god, why didn't we think of that before?

Bothersomely, the climactic scene of the novel, in which to save his people Billy must systematically beat a defenseless man to within an inch of his life, never did come clear to me—the way it apparently did for John Foytzer—as an auctorial "attack...on our inability to understand sacrificial violence." To the contrary, it looked and still looks like the same sort of ungainly plot contrivance (in this case, the need to break a previously-implanted post-hypnotic suggestion—I'm not making this up) that thriller writers often use in order to justify a spot of exciting sadism, preferably perpetrated by a sympathetic character. "Sacrificial violence?" Whose violence, whose sacrifice? Moral Seriousness has a tendency to make us expect moral coherence, but instead what Turner offers us is confusion and a peculiar tenderheartedness toward tough guys. As several other reviewers have pointed out, the perceived need for the beating later turns out to have been illusory, but nothing is made of it, not even regret. It vanishes, another loose string.

It may be less than fair to assess *Drowning Towers* as a feat of world-building, though certainly Turner's sober if-this-goes-on postscript invites it. But some pretty obvious questions intrude: why would a 21st-century Australia, impoverished like the rest of the world by population pressure and catastrophic climate change, build colossal concrete high-rises in which to house the bulk of their population, the permanently unemployed Swill? Surely the open spaces of Australia, even in this future, afford cheaper places in which to park excess humanity. Another: if automation has eroded the supply of jobs so badly that unemployment means permanent declassing from moderately-privileged Sweet to no-hope Swill, why is everyone so poor? Where are the products of this automation?

Some of these weaknesses, both human and macroscopic, are acknowledged in the novel's frame tale, in which the central story of the book is presented as a novel of the distant past by a 30th-century historian, an attempt to make sense of known but fragmentary historic fact. That some of the characters actually existed is established; which aspects of the tale we should take as her speculation is not, however, made clear. Through such Chinese-box metafictional tricks Turner may be encouraging us to think critically about the central narrative. Alternately, such stunts make a fine excuse for implausibilities.

Despite everything, *Drowning Towers* is an ambitious book, a book worth reading and criticizing and arguing over, a book that makes mistakes most SF authors won't even try. Its last line is the far-future historian's own thought, regarding her novel, that "the little human glimpses do help, if only in confirming our confidence in steadfast courage." And it is in the little human glimpses, not the noisy attempts to wrestle with angels, that Turner's novel achieves its greatest effects. Uncomfortable and ungainly, it's nevertheless the kind of book that lives on in your head when the latest award-winner has long since evaporated—lives on to be contended with for years to come. ▲

SUBSCRIBE



**You didn't start reading SF out of fascination with the trivia of a packaging and marketing industry.
You started reading SF because what excited you was SF.
The New York Review of Science Fiction is still excited.**

Please enter my subscription for one year of monthly issues of *The New York Review of Science Fiction*. I enclose \$24.00.

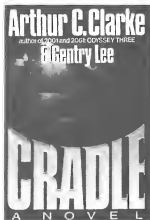
Name: _____

Address: _____

Please make all checks, etc., payable to Dragon Press. P.O. Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO

ARTHUR C. CLARKE, JOAN D. VINGE AND GREG BEAR



From the gifted mind of Arthur C. Clarke, a spellbinding novel of extraterrestrial adventure that does for the sea what his epic science fiction classic *2001: A Space Odyssey* did for outer space.

AN AUGUST HARDCOVER



Science fiction Grand Mistress Joan D. Vinge returns with an unforgettable futuristic adventure of drug smuggling, corruption and intrigue—her first major work since her Hugo Award-winning novel, *The Snow Queen*.

A SEPTEMBER HARDCOVER



The long-awaited sequel to multiple Hugo and Nebula Award-winning author Greg Bear's critically acclaimed bestseller, *Eon*, this is a captivating and breathtakingly imaginative journey to an alternate world.

AN OCTOBER HARDCOVER

© Warner Books 2008



WARNER BOOKS

A Warner Communications Company

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

This is the first issue of a monthly journal of reviews and opinion centered on the science fiction field. SF is, in our opinion, seriously in need of a frequent publication combining high reviewing standards with a knowledge of the literature, a publication which is suspicious of trends but sympathetic to a continuing evolution of thought and achievement that seems to have been more often referred to than discussed in recent years. We have been publishing a little magazine, *The Little Magazine*, which is now 22 years old and too expensive to continue. And, as it happens, the entire staff of the magazine is involved in the SF field. What better, we thought, than to change our direction to conform more closely to our interest in SF.

We have not been happy with the general situation in SF reviewing for more than a decade now. The days are gone when every major SF book (and many minor ones) would be reviewed by such luminaries as James Blish, Joanna Russ, Fritz Leiber, Judith Merril, Algis Budrys, Theodore Sturgeon, and Damon Knight. While these critics often disagreed, they nevertheless set a high level of discourse. Nowadays a competent piece of hackwork can be praised at the expense of an ambitious, if not wholly successful, novel by a significantly talented unknown (viz. the *Washington Post Book World* review of Paul Park and Jack Chalker last year). Well, to echo the old *Galaxy* line from the fifties, you won't find it in the *New York Review of SF*.

Deeper than the hip politics of young writers' manifestos (and the rash generalizations of some older ones), there is a feeling of discomfort in SF today. The superficial growth of the field has outstripped the ability of the SF culture to cope, except by inadequate democratization and levelling of interests. Norwescon now features later tag programming, in addition to other events and tracks that have overblown what was recently a serious regional convention. So smaller conventions, such as Readercon and Sercon, Fourth St. Fantasy Convention and Necon, fill the need for focus on the literature.

And the semiprozines, especially *Locus* and *SF Chronicle*, have grown so large and comprehensive that masses of data—however useful—outweigh informed opinion. Perhaps *SF Eye* and *SF Guide* will emerge as important magazines, or perhaps more U. S. readers will pick up on the excellent *Foundation* or *Australian SF Review*. But none of these publications has a consistently broad attitude toward reviewing, emulating the giants of the past and dealing in a timely fashion with notable current books.

The New York Review of SF aims to become the leading review medium in SF. In addition, we will publish engaging and provocative essays on topics of interest to SF readers, and a variety of special entertainments—for instance, artwork and columns by Daniel M. Pinkwater. The recommended-reading lists contributed to this issue by Algis Budrys, Lewis Shiner, and Larry Niven are the first installments of another regular feature; lists from other individuals within the field will be appearing on an ongoing basis. Additional continuing features will be evident with the passage of time.

Enjoy. Subscribe!

—The Editors

The New York Review of Science Fiction

P. O. Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570

FIRST CLASS MAIL

**THIS SCAN IS
COURTESY OF THE
LENNY SILVER
COLLECTION**